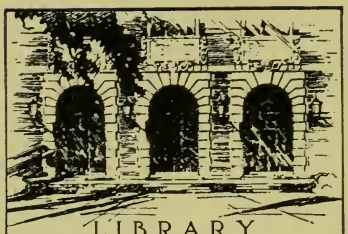

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MAUD ATHERTON,

BY

ALFRED LEIGH.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LONDON:
JAMES BLACKWOOD & Co., LOVELL'S COURT,
PATERNOSTER ROW.

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TO

JOHN D. ROSS, Esq.,

(Of Singapore.)

IN REMEMBRANCE OF A LONG AND VALUED FRIENDSHIP,

THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED,

AS A SLIGHT EXPRESSION

OF

THE AUTHOR'S AFFECTIONATE ESTEEM.

MAUD ATHERTON.

CHAPTER I.

Clear and cool—clear and cool,
By laughing shallow and dreaming pool;
Cool and clear—cool and clear,
By shining shingle and foaming weir;
Under the crag where the ousel sings,
And the ivied wall, where the church bell rings,
Undefiled for the undefiled,
Play by me, bathe in me, mother and child.

Charles Kingsley. "*The Water Babies.*"

THE little river Elva seemed to sing the words as it sparkled in the sunlight one bright June morning.

Onward it flowed, wending its way through grassy vallies and along the outskirts of rural villages, until, as other rivulets flowed into its bosom, its fairy laughter ceased, and it became a

broad and rushing stream, carrying all with it to the sea beyond.

But, in the quiet little village of Elverley, its song knew no sadness, and it hid no dread secret beneath its translucent waters. The sunlight was bright on everything—on the picturesque cottages of the villagers—on the fields of ripening corn—on the gently undulating hills—and on the old church, whose grey stones were lovingly embraced by their luxuriant growth of ivy. It was not a grand scene; there were no towering mountains, no rushing waterfalls, but there was healthful beauty of no small degree. Such scenery might never create a poet, but any one who had learned something of Nature's many-coloured meanings, could have worshipped her there, and asked no nobler shrine.

But the spot an artist's eye would have lingered most lovingly upon, was an old tree, whose lowest boughs, bending over the stream, formed a rustic chair, seated in which, in an attitude of

unstudied grace, was a girl of eighteen, who had dropped the book she had been reading, and was watching the river before her, as though it hid some happy secret, which eluded her discovery. Maud Atherton's lady acquaintances generally denied that she was beautiful; and, perhaps, if her features in repose had been delineated in marble, their slight irregularity might have disqualified them for such praise. But beauty, whether of face or of thought, must be viewed in its completeness, and not be subjected to a rigid analysis, as though it were a glass of suspicious water, or a loaf of questionable bread. Moreover, the sculptor's power is not quite infinite, and marble could have given but a faint idea of Maud's wonderful dark eyes, while it would merely have parodied the clustering tresses of her rich brown hair. And the chief charm of her face would have baffled all imitation, for that lay in her ever-changing expression—it was a face to watch, to study, to find perennial freshness in and new meaning every day.

The bright June morning is Maud's eighteenth birthday, and she is listening to the song of the river, partly with the glad consciousness of a life that has known little sorrow, and partly with a wistful longing to read the meaning of the coming years.

She had scarcely ever been out of Elverley since they first came there, and as that was fourteen years ago, she had no more distinct memory of London, where she was born, than vague remembrances of large houses, and crowds of strange and unsympathetic faces.

The sweetest figure in the early scenes of a woman's life drama—a mother with her loving protection, and rapid osul-sympathy, was quite unknown to her, and though she fancied her father fulfilled all the requirements of her womanly instinct to worship some one, there were depths in her glad, bright nature, that could never be sounded by a prematurely saddened man.

And though Ralph Atherton had as brave a

heart as ever bore the agony of weary hours with silent heroism, his life was but the struggle of a wounded warrior, whose strength is ebbing fast, but whose valour can only be quelled by death. And yet twenty years before the time of which I write, Ralph Atherton's future seemed as bright as life looked to his fair daughter now. The younger son of a baronet well known in political circles, as a man of rather more than ordinary talent and very much more than ordinary ambition, his father determined that, although by the unaccountable mistake of nature in sending his brother Harold into the world before him, Ralph could neither succeed to the family estates, nor to the baronetcy, he should enter into the political struggle which his father loved so well, and gain the laurels the old baronet had worn only in imagination. Harold, the elder brother, showed early a preference for stable boys to statesmen, and sporting newspapers to the speeches of Burke, and there had sprung up between him and his

father that mutual dislike, which is almost inevitable between natures diametrically opposite, that have no rallying point of common sympathy.

"Yes," (the old baronet would say to himself when a good dinner and a few glasses of old Madeira had put him in that comfortable frame of self-complacency and contentment, which is commonly attributed to the influence of a good conscience), "Yes, Ralph shall have the forty thousand pounds which it is in my power to leave him, and then if he marries an heiress, and enters parliament there will be a brilliant career before him, and as for Harold, he may go to the Devil."

Sir James Atherton, having thus sketched out a creditable and probable career for each of his sons, would subside into slumber, with the tranquillity of a good man who has disposed of his earthly affairs conscientiously and well.

Whether Harold ever went where his father suggested, is a matter of uncertainty. He certainly made strenuous efforts to do so, and travelled

a long distance in that direction. But be this as it may, it is certain that Ralph failed utterly to meet his father's views.

What a pity it is men will not recognise that we are far more capable of judging of their private affairs than they. When our own orthodox opinions become the universal creed of humanity, the salvation of society will ensue, as inevitably as a crop of potatoes. But until that golden time, we must expect some rather fantastic actions in our dealings with men. Sir James's pet idea, the one thought that ran through all his meditations, was literally a golden thread binding them all together. Ralph must marry an heiress. Ralph however had his own views on the subject, and altogether declined to do so, not, he said, that he had any sentimental objection to money, but because he had found something infinitely more precious—an Italian girl, with no dowry but a woman's heart and an angel's face.

Sir James did not behave at all like a father

in melodrama, invoking curses upon the head of his undutiful child. He simply took a pinch of snuff, told Ralph not to be a fool, and said he would speak with him on the subject again to-morrow. Angry as he was about the whole affair, he never thought for a moment of any serious difference arising between them. "The boy is not the first who has gone mad about a lovely face," he said, "he will think better of it in a day or two." But the old man had altogether mistaken the inherent strength of Ralph's character. On the subject being renewed, he only reiterated his former remarks, that he loved the beautiful Italian girl, (she was a governess in the house of a wealthy politician, an old friend of the Athertons) and would marry her in defiance of the whole world. The dispute grew passionate, Sir James was unreasonable and Ralph hasty: the natural result was a quarrel between the two, and they parted, never to clasp each other's hand again.

But Ralph Atherton cared little for poverty, since he had won Beatrice Genari, his queen, whom he loved with a passionate idolatry for his wife. He took literature for his profession, for which his wide and varied culture, and his brilliant talents eminently fitted him, and they were quietly married in a dusty old city church, in an out of the wav locality, as difficult to find out as the meaning of a modern Epic.

For one year Ralph led a life which seemed to him enchantment. He had a few hundred pounds of his own, so they were saved from anything like actual want, and though he had to work hard, there was always one beautiful face near him to be the starlight of his labour, always one voice to stimulate him to a higher achievement, and nobler fulfilment of duty, always one smile to be his bright reward.

But the domain of sorrow is only narrower than that of death: and just as brilliant prospects of achieved purpose and well won fame rose for

Ralph Atherton, his fair young wife, in giving birth to a daughter, died.

It is the fashion in these strangely contradictory times of ours, to question the reality alike of love and grief. And yet, strange as it may seem, there are a few men and women who yield their whole wealth of passionate devotion once, and if their idol be broken, feel that life for them has lost all beauty, and the world all charms.

Ralph Atherton was one of those men, and for months after his beautiful wife died, those around him dreaded that his reason would be impaired. At last, however, the true soul came out victor from the struggle—he awoke to the consciousness that, though elected to suffering, there yet remained work for him to do, and, with a heart sad and weary, but brave and true, he entered on the battle of life afresh.

But the sorrow he had passed through had strangely altered him. Yielding up the prizes that were almost within his grasp, he determined

to enter the church, and dedicate his life to the needs of some obscure country parish.

Of course his friends endeavoured to dissuade him from what they considered to be so mad a course. If Atherton must be a clergyman, they argued, let him have a West End Church, with a fashionable congregation where his talents would be appreciated; and he must inevitably attain the rather questionable distinction (they did not call it so) of a popular preacher. But this was precisely the last thing Ralph desired, and the parish of Elverley offering itself at this time, he had accepted it, and had come to live there with his little daughter Maud, who was now a bright-eyed child of four years old, who showed already rather too evident indications of a Southern temperament, with generous impulses, passionate attachments and profound dislikes.

And in Elverley, Maud had grown from childhood into beautiful girlhood, with strange and unconventional views of life, its responsibilities,

its possibilities, and its worth, founded partly on her father's teachings, partly on the works of old poets and dramatists, but chiefly on the true instincts of her woman's heart.

It is a confession that will place Maud beyond the pale of many a reader's sympathy, but truth sternly demands it should be made; so I must admit at once that of the ladylike science of flirting she knew absolutely nothing, and when a languishing curate from a neighbouring parish had shown alarming symptoms of becoming maudlin in his admiration, she had met his wooing with such exquisite badinage and rippling laughter, that the ecclesiastical hero had retired discomfited from the field, to vent his displeasure by attacks upon the orthodoxy of his parishioners, and to read to the feminine portion of them sundry homilies upon the frivolities of their sex. This shows the deplorable influence of a secluded life. Of course, if Maud had been a young lady of correct ideas, she whould have treated his heart like a fan, that

is to say, she would have played with it, for a few evenings and then broken it.

And yet, strange as it may seen, the little village worshipped her. The dullest rustic there—who viewed life as a sphere for the consumption of fat bacon and ale, and the fundamental fault of society's organisation, that these delicacies were so hard to get—even he had some misty consciousness that Miss Maud belonged to a higher order of beings, and would have yielded, (hear this, oh ye who mourn over chivalry as a dead creed!) a mug of his beloved "yale" to win one of her sunny smiles.

Not that Ralph Atherton had always been popular with them. The well-to-do-farmers, when he first came there had shaken their heads gravely over his theology, as heterodox, and as being connected in some way not clearly defined with Atheism, Popery, and the Devil.

Elverley had always plumed itself on its orthodoxy, and a man with new views was a

notoriously unpleasant fact. For instance, he talked much of the mystery of life, and they had never regarded it in that light at all. If there were any little difficulties in the scheme of the Divine economy, what was "parson" paid for but to explain them?

But these complaints of Mr. Atherton's heterodoxy belonged to the past, so I need not dwell upon them. Gradually they came to recognise the beauty of his self-abnegating life, slowly they began to learn the power of his kindly heart and practical sympathy, while even the teaching which had given sundry of the "dearly beloved brethren" such grave offence at first, by slow and painful degrees began to assert itself. I am not writing of an ideal state of society: I do not say Ralph Atherton succeeded in transmuting men leading lives almost vegetable in their stupidity, into a band of Christian heroes, with all-embracing sympathies and apostolic faith; but I do say that he stirred some nobler

longings in the hearts of most of them, and suggested to them the possibility of the Divine love being a deeper and grander thing than ever they had dreamed before.

Stupidity and dogmatism were not rooted out, but their power was curbed and narrowed, and even that proved Ralph's labours not all in vain: perhaps the angels smile when we talk about the fruitlessness of noble lives.

But Maud—sunny, happy, beautiful Maud—had been the idol of the village from the first. In her finely strung nature there were such rapid sympathies, that whoever wanted sympathy (and who does not?) would go instinctively to her for help and comfort. If a sweetheart was false, (as sweethearts have had a knack of being, even before the time of Proteus,) Jane and Bessie would seek Miss Maud's counsel; if an only son was undutiful, who so fit as she to suggest a wise and prudent course of action? And to descend from such tragical suffering, it is the historian's duty

to record, that the most refractory child in Elverley would cease roaring at her approach, her sweet face being pleasantly suggestive of sweetmeats and caresses.

It was not by words that all this was done: on religious subjects Maud rarely spoke to them. Miss McNutt, the former vicar's daughter, had plied them with tracts, with a regularity as rigid as the views they enforced, without ever winning their homage and touching their hearts as Maud did. I think it was mainly because they felt her to be pure-hearted and true, that their faith in purity and truth grew and strengthened; but however this may be, it is certain she filled their cottages and their rather dull lives with gladness. How she did them good, they never asked themselves: she came like sunshine, and by some occult process made life brighter, and sorrow easier to be borne.

Explanations are generally tedious, but like officious relatives, the income-tax, and other

necessary evils, they must be endured with patience, for without some idea of a life's past, we lose the key to its present actions. There is sublime comfort, no doubt, in letting "the dead past bury its dead," but like many other well-sounding phrases, it is not always easy to carry its precepts into practical effect. The past does not die: it lives on in us and in our lives, a power not to be banished by philosophical axioms—a writing on the heart's tablets not to be effaced by penitential tears.

What influence this quiet village had upon Maud Atherton, what power for good or evil it exerted upon her character, the course of this story must unfold.

Maud indulged her reverie rather longer than was her wont, but at last she sprang lightly down from her rustic seat, and gaily humming an operatic air, walked slowly to the vicarage.

How beautiful the world seems when we have only known it for eighteen years, and every pulse

of our being throbs with the glad consciousness of healthful energy.

Ralph Atherton spoke so much of the agony and weariness of life, that Maud had become familiarised with the words, and she had caught something of their meaning from the poets she loved so well; but sorrow to her was essentially a thing belonging to the outer world, for the petty annoyances which she had known had passed over her like a shadow over a field of waving corn, only to heighten the effect of the golden sunlight which followed it.

Ralph Atherton was unusually silent and thoughtful that day, but in the evening when Maud was sitting at the piano, letting her fingers wander over the keys, with a dreamy forgetfulness of everything, he came into the room and sat down near her.

It was one of the many contradictions of Maud's nature to love minor music and sad cadences far better than livelier strains; but I

suppose every life has its under-tone of sadness, though it may need something as exquisite as music to give it a responsive echo. When and how Maud acquired her wonderful mastery over the instrument is a mystery. She had no higher culture than the village organist could give, which was of an extremely common-place nature.

But there was something about her playing which all the musical professors in Christendom, could never have taught her—that subtle, indefinable power of giving melody a soul, speaking with strangely mingled meaning to human souls, and touching the life-roots of a listener's heart. That evening she was playing a low sweet air of her own composition, with varied movements and in different keys; but through all the changes of harmony, this one strange melody uttered itself almost like the suppliant wailing of a spirit's anguish.

It seemed so, at all events, to Ralph Atherton, for there passed a look of pain across his face,

which made Maud break the strain abruptly off, and begin the first brilliant movement of a German waltz.

"Stop, dear," he said, as though the light sounds jarred roughly on his feelings, "I wish to speak to you Maud upon a subject that has been very long in my thoughts."

Maud softly closed the piano. "Shall I ring for candles," she said, "or can we talk together in this delicious twilight?"

"No, don't ring," said her father, drawing her gently to the window, "there is light enough for me to see your face, darling, and I need no more."

Maud brought a hassock to the window, and sat down in her favourite position at his feet.

"Maud," he said, after a few moments' silence, "you have never asked me about your mother, have you never longed to know about our love for each other?"

"I have often longed to question you concerning her," Maud answered softly, "but I have felt

a dread of paining you by heedless words."

"You are wonderfully like her," he said musingly, "so like, that if my heart did not tell me my life's spring-time was over long ago, I could almost fancy that you are she, and that your beauty has never faded, because it is of heaven, not earth."

And then, while the twilight shadows slowly deepened, Ralph Atherton, holding Maud's hand in his, told her the story of his life, not in bare outline as I have done, but lingering lovingly on every thought and remembrance of his fair young wife.

"That is my story, darling," he said, when he had finished; "you will not wonder now that I am graver—sadder perhaps, than most men; but you have gladdened my life more than I can ever tell you. I have something of a lover's feeling for you, as well as a father's."

Maud listened eagerly, but spoke no word.

"I have told you this, darling," continued her

father, "that you may know the secret of my life—your mother's story I will read you some day in her own words—but not to-night. This necklace is connected with it, and once was hers. It shall be yours now."

He held in his hand a gold necklace, with a small locket attached. Maud could see in the faint light that the strong hand, (which held it lovingly as though it were a wounded bird,) trembled.

Her father clasped it gently round her neck: "Let it be a talisman," he said, "to guard you from anything that could dim the brightness of true womanhood."

Maud rose from her low seat, and putting her arms round his neck, comforted him, as only women can. Broken words of sympathy were all she said—I need not write them here, they would not convey much calmly read, without her low, sweet voice, and her soft caresses, to give each syllable a meaning. But the deepest things of

life after all, are those concerning which all history is silent. If the secrets of every heart were laid bare, (to indulge an impossible fancy), I think we should learn that the sentences which have moved men most deeply, and nerved them for the highest victory, making life possible, and heaven near—have been not the battle-cries of freedom, nor the formulas of creed, but some tangled phrases from a woman's lips—so simple that a child might utter them, yet so inspiring that they seemed like the voice of God.

How long they sat together, in the dreamy twilight, silent, yet with hearts very near, Maud never knew. The shadows grew denser, and a lazy-voiced clock ticked drowsily from the mantel-piece with no power to break the spell.

At last a figure that might have served an artist as a study for Juliet's nurse appeared at the door with candles which, with much panting, she laid upon the table.

"And, how you can sit in the dark, Miss Maud,

she said," when candles can be had for the asking, I don't know, but young ladies is so strange."

"Profoundly true, Sarah," said Maud laughing "but you must exercise more charity. Every one's complexion will not stand a strong light so well as yours."

Sarah had been Maud's nurse from babyhood, and did not scruple to avail herself of the privilege of fault-finding. (A luxury by the way to which old friends and old servants are rather unpleasantly addicted.)

Whether Sarah's feelings were too deep for utterance, or whether she thought her dignity would be compromised by further speech, is a point on which posterity will never be enlightened. For once she submitted to be silenced, merely indulging in a parting slam of the door, which was positively epigrammatic in its defiance.

Mr. Atherton smiled. "After all," he said, "you have not heard the secret I came to tell you. Do you know that you are what is

commonly called 'a young lady of fortune.'"

"I have always regarded myself in that light," said Maud gaily. "My wealth is boundless. I will give you a list of a few of my possessions in Shakesperian style, in the manner of Olivia, whom you ought in politeness to tell me I resemble. Thus, item—a father who can do anything which is grand, and lets me do anything, which is better still. That comes first, of course, let me see what's next? Oh! item, sundry dresses more or less in need of mending. (I'm afraid the age has outgrown its admiration for my favorite blue one, as much as that dissenting minister, Mr. Jones, said it had the necessity for a state church; still we'll count it. Then there's item—"

"Suppose you place the sum of one hundred thousand pounds as the next item in your calculation," said Mr. Atherton, catching the infection of his pretty daughter's high spirits, "if you recognise so insignificant a sum as a possession worth mentioning."

"I am obtuse," said Maud, with no change in her tone, "if there is one accomplishment in the world I pride myself upon, it is the perception and appreciation of a joke; but I am wholly in the dark as to the meaning of this one."

"You are certainly the most extraordinary young lady to make a business announcement to, I ever knew. I tell you that you are the heiress to a fortune, and you call it a joke. Don't you know, you ridiculous child, that even eyes like yours have no such power over the mass of men, as this 'joke' which appears to you so grievously deficient in point?"

"But I have no such fortune," said Maud, with a look of utter astonishment, expressed in the eyes in question.

"But you will have on your twenty-first birthday," said her father, "quietly sit down again, and I will tell you how."

Maud sat down in utter bewilderment: if her father had incidentally mentioned that she was

a princess by birth he could scarcely have astonished her more.

"When I declared to my father my intention of marrying," he resumed, "we quarrelled, as you know, and, naturally enough, I forfeited thereby the fortune I should otherwise have inherited; but I learned for the first time, when he died, that my father relented at the time of your birth, and bequeathed the sum of forty thousand pounds to you."

"Then do you mean to tell me," said Maud, beginning to realise the situation, "that that sum, which seems to me like the treasure of a fairy's tale, is actually mine?"

"Yes," was the reply, "and a great deal more too. The terms of the will were very simple. Forty thousand pounds, half in government funds, were left to you; the conditions being that the money should accumulate at compound interest until you were one and twenty. This has been strictly observed, and the sum already

amounts to eighty-four thousand pounds, (it has been accumulating for fifteen years remember,) so by the time it becomes yours the value of the estate will exceed a hundred thousand pounds."

"And supposing I die, before I come of age," said Maud, "what becomes of the money then?"

"In that case," replied Ralph, "it would go to a remote branch of the family, under conditions expressed in my father's will."

"To console them under the agony of bereavement," said Maud, lightly, adding in a graver tone, "but, father, why was I never told about this before?"

"It was my fathers's special desire that you should be kept in ignorance of the state of affairs until your eighteenth birthday," said Mr. Atherton, "it is easy to understand his motives."

"Well," said Maud, "I suppose I ought to be very glad and grateful, but with that perversity which characterises my sex in general and myself in particular, I feel nothing of the kind.

What am I to do with a hundred thousand pounds? I have no expensive tastes except an extravagant fondness for new gloves, and a passion for chocolate creams."

"Maud, you are incorrigible," said her father, rising, "I think you would sacrifice life itself sooner than lose the chance of an epigram. But see," he added, pointing to the drowsy clock before mentioned, the hands of which, as it grew later seemed absolutely to yawn, "past twelve o'clock. Go to bed now, darling, and defer all schemes pecuniary or otherwise till to-morrow."

Maud kissed her father even more lovingly than usual, with a look in her bright eyes which told him better than speech could do, that with all her light moods, she treasured up his words about her mother, and that the necklace she wore should be tarnished by no unworthy thought in the bosom on which it lightly rose and fell.

But she felt in no humour for sleep; so opening her little bedroom window, she sat down to watch

the village bathed in moonlight, and listen to the ripple of the river, which could faintly be heard in the distance.

And it was characteristic of Maud, that the chief theme of her reverie was not the unexpected fortune she was to inherit, nor the new interests and plans it suggested, but the scene as her fancy pictured it, of her father young and enthusiastic, toiling with a light heart for the sake of his beautiful Italian bride.

CHAPTER II.

"My father aye tauld me, my mither and a'
Ye'd mak' a gude husband and keep me aye braw;
It's true I love Johnnie, he's young and he's bonnie,
But wae's me I ken he has nothing ava!
I ha'e little tocher, ye've made a gude offer,
I'm now mair than twenty, my time is but sma',
Sae give me your plaidie, I'll creep in beside ye,
I thought ye'd been aulder than threescore and twa'."

Old Scotch Song.

A HERO—whether of a nation's history or a woman's life, belongs to a class whose title is vaguely but weightily suggestive. According to the old epical conception of his character, he was an embodied principle rather than an individual, playing a tragical part in human destiny, which was gloomy, mysterious, and excessively dreary. It would have been an act of less foul sacrilege

to propose a comic song at a quakers' meeting, than to associate him with common necessities or vulgar wants.

That he occasionally ate and drank, shaved, or sneezed, was a circumstance if not absolutely denied, at all events systematically disregarded, and some relic of this view may be found in the hackneyed proverb concerning his *valet-de-chambre*, which suggests with proverbial infallibility that cutting Homer's hair would be fatal to an admiration of the Odyssey, and that the worthy who brushed Shakespeare's doublet probably regarded Hamlet as a very common-place producduction indeed.

We find very little of this majestic being in modern literature, and seeing how few such gentlemen are to be met with in daily life, we will not indulge in any very sentimental requiem over him, but consign him to the grave as young wives inter their old husbands, with pious resignation.

Whether our modern hero, with his pleasant idiosyncrasy of breaking mens' heads and womens' hearts upon the slightest suggestion, is altogether an improvement, may be regarded as open to question, but as Arthur Calverley, the hero of my story, belongs to neither class, I will not stay to discuss the matter.

One June evening Arthur was seated in his pleasant little rooms at Norwood, dining with his old friend and schoolfellow, Walter Medhurst.

Nor will I apologise for introducing him engaged in so unheroic an occupation. I am aware that first impressions are generally lasting, and that it is trying, to eat and look sublime at the same moment—but as I have already warned those in quest of unflagging tragedy off these pages, I am content to recognise the dull realities of vulgar life.

Yet the most fastidious critic must have admired Arthur's face. It possessed the primal charm of clearly cut features and large expres-

sive eyes, but beyond that there was striking beauty in its perfectly rounded curves, and in the red lips, sensitive, yet capable (as an occasional expression evinced) of displaying a profound depth of passionate determination.

His friend formed a striking contrast to him; tall, finely proportioned and athletic, his face was only remarkable for its keen intelligent eyes, and a general expression of frankness, which is Nature's stamp royal of a brave heart, and invariably commands instinctive respect and trust.

"And so Walter," said Arthur, "no prayers that I have wit to utter will prevail upon you to stay another day with me."

"If it were possible for me to stay, I should need no persuasion to do so: you must recognize my dignity: I am a country doctor, almost as indispensable an official as a parish beadle. So I must go back to-night by the last train."

At this moment a mysterious looking woman appeared in the room, removed the dishes noise-

lessly, laid others on the table, (with an expression of agony, such as an eastern mother might have displayed while immolating a child upon the altar of Moloch,) and retired.

"That woman," said Arthur, as she closed the door after her, "is as profound a mystery as life itself."

"She cooks uncommonly well," said the young doctor, glancing in a quick professional way at the dinner before him.

"Oh yes, she cooks well enough, and I don't suppose there is another house in Norwood managed so well, but the mystery is who and what she is. I have had these rooms five years, and I know no more about her now than I did at first. I have amazed myself by the ingenuity of my conjectures concerning her. Sometimes I fancy she is a disguised Duchess, at other times I decide that she is a highly cultured charwoman; the only thing she told me about herself was that her name is Blinkum, but I don't for a moment

believe it. Take another glass of Madeira, Walter, and let me have the benefit of your theory on the subject."

But Walter Medhurst seemed disinclined to follow up the light turn the conversation had taken; he filled his glass, but he did not immediately reply.

"Arthur" he said at last, "when I saw you for the first time after our five years separation, you promised to tell me something of what you have been doing while we were apart. That is three days ago, and you have told me nothing."

"Well" said Arthur, "it is like you to take an interest in it, but my story is very far from being a sublime one. I think you know it was impressed upon me ever since I wore pinafores, that I was to be my father's sole heir."

"Yes, I know that," said Walter, "but such prophecies are always subject to a little uncertainty."

"Mine were at all events," replied Arthur,

taking up the thread of his story, "for, four years ago, my father informed me of his intention to marry again. Now that's not an agreeable communication for a son, under any circumstances, but when I tell you it was to the one woman, whom of all others I dislike, you will fancy with what kind of delight I received the announcement."

"Did you and your father quarrel about it?" asked his friend.

"No" returned Arthur, "there was no end to be gained by that, but we agreed to part, my father married a few weeks after, and three years ago I received a letter informing me of the birth of a son to them, to which epistle a pathetic postscript was added to calm the anxiety of my soul, by the announcement that Mrs. Calverley was doing well."

"And did the matter end there?" enquired Walter Medhurst.

"No" replied Arthur, "not quite, my father

then drew up a deed of gift, bestowing an income of two hundred a year upon me, and gave me very plainly to understand that I had nothing further to expect from him, either before or after his death, and so the matter has stood ever since."

"Arthur," said his friend, laying one hand lightly upon his shoulder, "you are withholding something from me. When we were at school together, you were always the leader in any freak of mischief, and yet slight as was the effort you put forth, you distanced all competitors; when we were at college you were generally in the cricket field or on the river, while other men were reading with damp towels round their heads; yet, here again you gained brilliant honours, and whenever you really strove for an object, it was hopeless to contend against you. And when you went out into the world, you had endless dreams of what you would achieve and conquer, and no man's success seemed so inevitable. But when I meet you again after five years'

interval, I find you with no profession, no plans, and nothing accomplished. Surely the mere loss of fortune could not have changed you so."

"I don't know that I am so greatly changed," said Arthur, slowly, "or if I am, it is hardly to be wondered at that I should be a little less enthusiastic and hopeful after the lapse of five years."

"Not changed," returned the other, "why five years ago life seemed to have no prize too high for you. You might have taken a prominent part in the political struggle, and you have not attempted to do so; you might have been a great artist, and you have nothing to show but a handful of sketches, not one of which rises above mere prettiness. Chief of all, you might have gained distinction as an author, and you have written nothing but a few more or less graceful songs, and a cynical comedy."

"You are hard upon my poor comedy," interrupted Arthur, good-naturedly.

"No, I am not," said Walter. "I freely admit the dialogue is brilliant, the interest well sustained, and one or two—though by no means all of the characters are ably drawn; it would probably succeed if it were published, but the whole tone of it is unworthy of you."

"What tone?"

"The general insinuation that all men are either knaves or fools—a creed which is old, dreary, and utterly false."

"I am not so sure of its falsity," said Arthur, somewhat taken aback by this concise summing up of his views, "knaves are far from being rarities, and fools are as common as bad wine."

"Granted; but what then? If the satirist is to have an honoured place among writers he must be a teacher and believe in something. What is the use of telling a man he is, on the whole, rather a fool, if you have no better course of life to suggest to him? You merely disturb his digestion, and a hot supper of pork and onions would do that quite as well."

Arthur made no reply, but there was a look of irresolution on his handsome face, which Walter rightly read to be a struggle between his friend's pride, and a desire to confide in him.

"Moreover" he continued, "I especially dislike the way you write of women. Five years ago, Arthur, you were as chivalrous as any knight of old who ever splintered lance, now you delineate with evident pleasure a heartless creature like Alice Elphenden, the heroine of your comedy, and gravely inform us she is a fair type of her sex. See here," he added taking a manuscript from a side table and turning the leaves hurriedly over, "here is an agreeable theory for example to come, from a woman's lips. It is in the third scene, and she is speaking to her rival—Ethel, (by the way the lover wasn't worth quarrelling about). 'We women differ only in our faces, our voices and our capacity to lie. Souls, my dear Ethel, are as antiquated as knightly armour. Remove lying in all its manifold forms from society, and

the sooner the poor old creature could be decently buried the better. If truth were anything but a polite fiction, life would not be endurable for fifteen minutes.' What possible excuse can there be for writing such nonsense as that?"

"You are right," said Arthur sadly, "and yet that is only a forcible statement of what in some moods, I am tempted to believe. Do you remember Kate Rushton? You met her once or twice at my father's house, I think."

"Yes," said Walter, "I remember her very well. So lovely a face is not easily forgotten."

"I wish to heaven it were," was the bitter rejoinder. "There was once a time when I worshipped her beauty, and was fool enough to fancy her soul was like it."

"Did you ever tell her so?"

"Tell her so," echoed Arthur angrily, the silent bitternes of years finding rapid utterance, "I not only told her so, but she vowed that she loved me in return—and then—and then—like many a boy's tragedy, it ended in a farce."

"How did it end?"

"When my father married again, I wrote and told her of my altered fortunes, and she replied by breaking off our engagement, and sending back every present I had given her—but one."

"And what was that," asked Walter quickly.

"The ring I had given her as a troth pledge. I suppose she kept it for the trophy of the conquest, as an Indian warrior treasures a scalp."

"That is not likely," said the young doctor gravely, "perhaps she really loved you, and it 'stood upon the choice of friends:' in that case I can easily understand the impossibility of parting with it."

"Its no use you trying to justify her, Medhurst,' replied Arthur, "God knows I would have given my right hand for power to believe in her still. But I told you the affair ended in a farce. A year ago, I read the announcement of her marriage to Sir Thomas Glendale, a man thirty years her senior, with no idea in the world but money, and

not even good family to recommend him."

"Yes I have heard Sir Thomas discribed in pretty much the same way before to-night. He must be immensely wealthy though."

"Of course he is, or Kate Rushton would never have been his wife. She literally sold herself for the two hundred thousand pounds, or whatever it was made over to her by the marriage settlements. And a very resigned widow she'll make. Her golden hair will show to advantage on crape. There, you know my story now, and do you still wonder that I have grown aimless, and rather suspicious of womanly constancy?"

"Yes," replied the other firmly, "such a result is altogether unworthy of you, and to speak plainly, does not say much for your common sense. Take your story in its worst light, and what does it mean? Simply this, that one girl has proved mercenary, and false to you, and so you educe from your experience of life the proposition, that constancy is a fiction, and pure-hearted woman-

hood a lie. That's rubbish, Arthur, and very ridiculous rubbish too."

Arthur was silent; it would have been easy to dispute this: he was a far better master of verbal fencing, than his practical clear-headed companion, but he felt in no mood for sophistry, and something in his inner consciousness told him, no reply he could make would be much else.

"Walter," he said at last, "you are a good fellow, and perhaps if I had confided in you before, I might have been spared much weariness and sorrow, but what makes you so doughty a champion of 'ladyes fayre?' Surely you have not so far belied your practical character as to catch that most contagious of diseases, love. I beg your pardon," he added quickly, seeing a look of pain pass across his companion's face, "I beg your pardon a thousand times, I had no idea I was jangling a tender string."

"Arthur," said the other quietly, "I suppose every life holds some secret of which no one

dreams. '*She was young, she was beautiful, she was loving, and she died.*' Such a memory lies at the root of many a life; it is the key to the whole meaning of mine."

Almost instinctively the two men clasped hands, but neither spoke. It costs a man an intense mental struggle to speak on those subjects which move him most deeply. Of pictures and politics, of horses and wine, of the large topics of national import, and the petty themes of passsing interest, he will talk fluently enough, but speak to him of his spirit's inner convictions, or the one woman he truly loves, and his lightest word of reply will be uttered with actual pain.

With women on the other hand, confidence is a kind of masonic rite, without the seal of which a friendship is incomplete, if not positively spurious.

Arthur was the first to break silence, and it was with something of his old light-hearted tone that he said—

"Come Walter, you must be consistent to your own views, you have denounced negative philosophy, as though it were closely allied to the art of picking pockets, let me have the benefit of some practical advice."

"Well," replied his friend, "my first advice is strictly professional. You are looking rather poorly, the first thing you have to do is to get well. Where are you going this summer? London is becoming unbearable."

"I am a poor man now," said Arthur, "so my possibilities are limited. Continental trips and lunar excursions, being equally out of the question. I suppose I shall go to Scarboro' or Ilfracombe."

"What possible use will that be," replied the Doctor, "you will spend more money than you can afford, to enable you to see people who will bore you, and to go through an amount of promenading, which is more fatiguing to contemplate even, than six months' exercise on the

treadmill. No, go to some great place, where a tourist is as rare a creature as a crocodile."

"If such a terrestrial paradise is to be found," said Arthur laughing, "I will certainly go there."

Walter Medhurst considered for a few moments, and then exclaimed, "I have it, go away for a month's fishing to Elverley. The scenery is beautiful, the air all that can be desired, the—"

"That sounds extremely like an advertisement," interrupted Arthur.

"But unlike all advertisements, it has the extraordinary merit of being true. I stayed there a few weeks last summer, and have been quite enthusiastic about it ever since."

"But what can an ordinary human being find to do there?"

"You will find excellent fishing if you care for that sort of thing, and you will see some effects of light and shade that will tax your artistic powers to portray, but why I chiefly want you to go there is, that you will have ample opportunities

for maturing your plans of future action. You ask for advice, mine is work—write—paint—do anything, but have some object in life. I would sooner sell braces than do nothing."

"I will go, Walter, to-morrow morning," said Arthur, catching something of his friend's energy. "Is there anything else about the place you can tell me?"

"Yes, you will find the 'Elm tree,' the most comfortable and sleepy inn, mortal ever stopped at; and by the way, I should like you to know Atherton, the vicar."

"Is he any relation to Sir Harold Atherton, whose horses carried away so many racing cups last year?" asked Arthur.

"His brother I believe, but altogether a different kind of fellow. There is some romance about his history I have heard. I don't know exactly what it is, but I think he married an Italian girl in opposition to his father's wishes, and that she died within a year of the wedding. I should very

much like you to know him, he is a highly cultured scholar, and a perfect gentleman. Would you like a line or two of introduction to him?"

"If it is not troubling you too much."

"No trouble in the world: if you'll hand me that inkstand and a sheet of note paper, I'll write it now."

Walter Medhurst wrote rapidly for two or three minutes, and then threw the letter across the table to Arthur, who read aloud—

'My Dear Atherton,

Upon my glowing description of your village, my old friend, Arthur Calverley, has decided to stay there a few weeks. As a visitor, I know he is certain of your courtesy, but I ask you to give him a place in your regard for two or three days, for my sake. I ask it for no longer time, for then you will have learnt to esteem him for his own. I hope you have been feeling stronger lately, and are not working too

hard. I fancy you sometimes forget that even clerical nerves are not made of steel.

With very kind regards to Miss Atherton, and yourself,

I am always,

Very faithfully yours,

Walter Medhurst.'

"Thank you Walter, that is very kindly worded. But who is this Miss Atherton you speak of—his daughter?"

"Yes," replied the other with a mischievous twinkle in his eyes, which escaped Arthur's notice. "Let me sketch her for you—tall, angular, spectacled and scholastic. Can you fill in the details?"

"Only too well," exclaimed Arthur, with a groan of comical horror. "I hope she's not sentimental too."

"Oh dear no," returned Walter "talk about the pauper question, and the latest scheme of scientific drainage, and you'll get on famously

together. But follow the precept of Mrs. Winifred Pryce, and 'look at the clock.' If I am to catch that train to-night, I must be off."

"I'll walk to the station with you," said Arthur rising, "we have plenty of time."

The bright June day had died away into a clear starry evening, when Arthur and his friend lit their cigars, and strolled towards the station.

"Good bye Walter," said Arthur as the train was on the point of starting, "but not for years I hope."

"I hope so too," said the other, "but before we do meet again, you will have done something great. Good bye."

And so they parted, Walter to his simple manly life of work and duty, and Arthur to make the necessary arrangements for his journey to Elverley.

As he walked home, it was natural looking up at the pure beauty of the summer starlight, to wonder idly, if the village he had heard of that evening for the first time, was destined to play

more than a passing part in his life drama.

It crossed his mind merely as an idle fancy, and no quick instinct revealed to him, that he stood at the turning point of his life, and that a few short weeks would decide irrevocably in what channel its streams should flow.

It is so with all of us—girt round with mystery, we stand on the brink of unknown seas. Every day may carry in its bosom a blessing that shall ring through the endless ages, or a curse that shall shatter the dream, fantasies of years. Every stranger we pass heedlessly by, may be destined to play the largest part in the farce-tragedy of our lives. But this is mystery which only time can solve. Thrice happy he who has found the golden thread of Divine love running through the tangled web of human existence. He can bear the darkness, knowing that morning must bring light, and can sail calmly over stormy seas in the tranquil faith that a haven of rest and beauty lies beyond.

CHAPTER III.

"Poor, wandering, wayward man! Art thou not tried, and beaten with stripes even as I am? Ever, whether thou bear the royal mantle or the beggar's gaberdine, art thou not so weary, so heavy-laden, and thy Bed of Rest is but a grave. O my brother, my brother, why cannot I shelter thee in my bosom, and wipe away all tears from thy eyes!"

Thomas Carlyle. "*Sartor Resartus.*"

IT was late the next evening when Arthur reached Elverley, after a tedious journey, followed by a drive of twelve miles from the railway station. But when the hired conveyance, which was a heavy lumbering antiquity, a kind of unsatisfactory compromise between a stage coach and a hay-waggon, stopped at its destination, he forgot half the tedium of the day.

Nor was this owing to any inherent cheerfulness on his part, for the 'Elm Tree' Inn was as suggestive of comfort, as slippers, receipted bills, and the announcement that one's mother-in-law has been removed to a better world.

I have called it an Inn, in deference to a legend to that effect, which adorned its exterior, but it bore so secluded and unbusiness-like an appearance, that even a teetotaller must have loved it. Just as the staunchest protestant of our own day, who has reported his vicar to the 'Rock' for ritualistic practices, and denounced popery at Exeter Hall, wandering through the dim aisles of an Italian Cathedral, is moved to something faintly akin to tolerance, so a teetotaller in sight of the 'Elm Tree' might not only have forgotten to anathematise it, but actually have entered the unholy portals to drink a glass of "liquid death," under the impression that he was imbibing ginger beer.

For the building was so quaint and old—the

heavy oaken doors so suggestive of quiet and old-fashioned comfort, the roses growing over the front of the house so exquisitely fragrant, and the face of the landlady so beamingly contented, that seeing all this a cynic might have smiled and renounced misanthropy for ever.

Arthur took these details in at one comprehensive glance, and having paid the driver liberally, and dismissed him with undisguised relief, turned with one of his pleasant smiles to the ruling spirit of the 'Elm Tree,' Mrs. Ephraim Tonkin.

"Ha—plump eight-and-thirty, good-looking and good-tempered—she'll do," was his mental decision.

"Ha—tall—handsome—and a perfect gentleman." This was hers.

"Mrs. Tonkin," said Arthur pleasantly, "my friend Dr. Medhurst tells me that the 'Elm Tree' is an earthly paradise, and after two minutes experience of it, I am half inclined to think the same."

Mrs. Tonkin dropped a gratified curtsey. "I shall be proud to accommodate any friend of Dr. Medhurst's, sir," she said, "it isn't often such gentlemen comes this way."

Arthur was quite right in deeming the plump widow good-looking, nineteen years had worn her wedding ring, but had failed ignominiously in their attempt to wrinkle her forehead, or change the colour of her wavy brown hair.

A ponderous family Bible notified that Ephraim Tonkin had married her nineteen years before, so I state the time without hesitation, but concerning Ephraim himself, history is silent. Some vague rumours were afloat in Elverley to the effect, that he had regarded a chair more in the light of an offensive weapon, than a support for a weary frame, that he had spoilt the beauty of matrimonial discussions, by the introduction of a poker into the argument; in short, that if he had not had the good sense to break his neck three months after the wedding-day, he must inevitably

have broken his wife's heart instead, but be this as it may, his widow had "laid him i'the earth," and come to live at Elverley with cheerful resignation, and two hundred a year.

"Would you like any supper, sir?" said the relict of the defunct Tonkin.

"No, thank you," said Arthur, "I had some at Entwich. I will just take a stroll while you see my bedroom prepared."

And having enjoyed a saunter in the soft evening air, the first appearance of Elverley in the moonlight, and the flavour of a transcendently excellent cigar, he went to bed.

Next morning was Sunday, and after he had enjoyed the fruit of Mrs. Tonkin's culinary genius, in the shape of a substantial breakfast, he went out for a short walk before church, to which he had not yet quite decided whether he should go or not.

"I am not particularly fond of country churches," he said to himself, as he wandered by

the little river Elva's fairy course, and enjoyed the fragrant breath of the sweet wild flowers growing upon its banks. "The organ is generally a note and a half too flat, and the choir several notes too sharp. The sermons too are respectable narcotics, but that is not very high praise. I wonder what Atherton will have to say for himself. Probably to tell us to refrain from murder, lying and criticism, and to come regularly to church. Medhurst said he was a very superior fellow, but that goes for nothing. The cleverest man I ever knew became an absolute dolt, the moment he put on a surplice. No, the birds have a better theology, and a more hopeful creed. I think I won't go this morning."

But the faint chime of the chuch bell sounded at this moment, and instead of trembling into silence as it had done before, began to summons the villagers to enter the old grey walls, and echo nature's hymn of praise. Arthur could see them coming from all directions at the ringing of the

bells. By the way, there are few more refreshing rarities than a really musical bell. It is part of our national character to worship ugliness, and many an excellent churchwarden is firmly persuaded, that there is a positive orthodoxy in every utterance of a cracked bell.

"After all" said Arthur, "I may as well go down and join them. I shall be able to see this awful Miss Atherton, Medhurst spoke of, and decide upon a line of tactics with regard to her—yes, I will go."

So saying, he walked quickly towards the church, that he might have the opportunity of a little quiet observation before service commenced.

He saw at a glance that the church was a very old one; indeed he hastily decided it must have been regarded in that light four hundred years ago. The old pillars were grey and discoloured, and the font—a rough stone rudely shaped, with only a rugged cross carved upon its side to reveal its sacred office, was chipped and tottering, but

this was all. Time had dealt gently with it, only touching it softly with his resistless hand; but the men and women of the past, who met together within these walls, who prayed and loved, or cursed and hated in their time, where are they? Gone from sight and from remembrance, even the inscription on their graves an illegible hieroglyphic!

Who can enter an old church without these thoughts? As they crossed Arthur's mind, the old weary questions, 'Is anything worth the effort it costs? Is life itself worth having? Of what use is it to struggle and battle, why not drift idly with the stream?' uttered themselves again. The dreariest of creeds, that all is vanity, is not natural to an enthusiastic and highly endowed nature; it only comes when faith has been wounded and trust misplaced. Every one knows Iago's remarks about the theft of reputation, but it is inexpressibly sadder to find our trust betrayed, and our worship a senseless idolatry. The man

who robs us of belief in friendship, and the woman who bids us hold love to be a lie, filch heart-wealth from us, and 'leave us poor indeed.'

It is very hard for an enthusiastic nature fully to realise that life must be regarded as something independant of our own small experience. All men are more or less influenced by circumstances, and though in the infinite possibilities of genius, there may have been hermits who have written burlesques, and mutes who have composed comic operettas, these gentlemen are not so common as to invalidate the general rule.

Arthur looked round the church while the organist was playing (rather tamely) the last few bars of the voluntary. The congregation was mainly composed of farmers and farm labourers, the exceptions being, the squire, Sir Herbert Stansfeld, and his sister Agnes, (a rather colourless looking girl of twenty,) the doctor and his wife, and a few other "gentle folks," whose

houses were scattered at distances from two to fifteen miles from Elverley.

Of these I need only mention Miss Gloffoggen, who was a lady of too remarkable characteristics to be parenthetically discussed. Arthur's heart sank within him when he saw her, for she answered with fatal exactness to Walter Medhurst's description of Maud Atherton. She was dressed in scarlet with a green bonnet adorned by large yellow flowers, and a shawl of no describable tint, which didn't fit, and was fastened by a brooch, irresistibly suggestive of a charity-boy's official badge. Her crowning attraction was a pair of blue spectables, with heavy metal rims and cracked glasses.

But her face! Arthur felt half-inclined to retreat at once, at the first sight of it: such a grim contempt for man it expressed, and such awful suggestiveness of latent scholarship, that he half expected to see her mount the pulpit stairs with masculine strides, and denounce him

personally with malignant gesticulations and her uplifted umbrella.

But at this moment, Ralph Atherton entered, and Arthur forgot even Miss Gloffoggen in studying the vicar's face.

"Strikingly handsome," he said to himself, "but with a strangely sad expression. Though that's hardly to be wondered at, seeing what an ugly congregation he has to preach to."

Nor was Ralph Atherton's voice less striking than his face. He read the prayers very quietly and with no regard to elocutionary effect, but with an exquisite power of inflection, and an utter absence of affectation, which sent the grand old words of the English liturgy home to Arthur's heart as they had not sounded for a long, long time. "At all events, this man knows how to read," thought he. "I don't think that awful looking woman can be his daughter, or he would have acquired the habit of shouting."

But when they stood up to sing, Arthur's

quick musical ear caught the sound of one sweet voice of such exquisite beauty, that he could not believe it belonged to any of the people he had already noticed.

It was not a voice of remarkable power, and it was only occasionally he heard it, but whenever a note reached him, it came like a breath of fragrant air in Midsummer.

But still the old struggle was going on in his mind. Why not give up the battle of life altogether, and cease to vex one's-self with all these tangled questions of duty and destiny?

He almost started to hear his thoughts pronounced audibly.

"*And I said, oh that I had wings like a dove, for then would I fly away, and be at rest.*"

It was the vicar's text, and Arthur roused himself to hear how this man with the marks of suffering upon his face, would handle it.

He began by talking of the mysterious thought-baffling agony of life, throbbing through every

fibre of the created world. He spoke of those who weep over graves, where slumber the hearts they would have gladly died to save, of broken faith, of cold estrangement, of baffled ambition and shattered hopes, of the disenchanting touch of Time, at which the fabrics of our early dreams crumble into ruin and decay.

And he spoke of doubt, intellectual and spiritual—of the hours when the soul gropes blindly for God, and finds him not—of the scarcely less bitter moments when the wronged spirit is tempted to atheism in humanity, and to question if truth be anything deeper than a fantastic dream.

And he spoke of voiceless suffering—of silent agony—of the hearts that break, and 'make no sign,' and from all these, he said, in all ages, the passionate cry had wailed to heaven—"this life is not a blessing but a curse, release us from it, set us free. Our brains are giddy, our hearts throb with agony, our feet are bleeding, give us rest, even if it be the slumber of eternal death."

Arthur was glad of a momentary pause, for these words had moved him strangely. Reality is always a power, and Ralph Atherton spoke of pain, not as a surgeon might speak of disease, or a seraph of sin, but in the unmistakeable accents of one who has fallen, sinned, suffered, fought and conquered himself. There was an unconventional honesty about him too: he did not evade the difficulties in his path, but met them fairly and tested them carefully, lest haply they might be at lowest, distorted truth. Moreover, his delivery was very effective. He rarely raised his voice above its usual quiet tone, and there was no dramatic gesture to make his periods striking: no one would have classed him among popular preachers, but there was a strength of hardly-won conviction and a wealth of passionate earnestness in his lightest tone, which would have redeemed his simplest saying from insignificance.

He went on to point out how earth's heroes had always been her sufferers, how learning was

gained by toil and experience, and by defeat, how the highest blessing conferred upon the world was bought by agony at which the silent earth shuddered. And he spoke of the Redeemer's agony in the hushed and reverend tones of one to whom Calvary was a reality and a power.

"And this brings me," he said, "to the one Divine gift which saves us from being crushed by this weight of agony and pain. Upon the breast of the sad weary earth, our Saviour wrote the only possible solution of the mystery of life—He wrote it with His sacred blood—the one word —Love.

And Ralph went on to point out how wherever this love had come, it made life possible.

In the pains of motherhood—in the drawing of hearts together among young men and maidens—in the fatherly tenderness of later years, always sorrow became lighter if love bade us bear the burden, nay more, it became a purifying furnace through which the true-hearted passed

unharmed, and emerged with a rarer lustre and a deeper strengh.

And thus he evolved the truth that beneath all the confusion and bitterness of existence, a Divine purpose was being worked out, and that it was ours by work and by endurance to assist its progress. He quoted the grand old saying 'he who maketh a little child happy for an hour is a fellow worker with God,' and he asked them to believe that their lowest work was sacred, their pettiest annoyance if patiently and bravely born-sublime.

"Rest will be given us" he concluded, "in God's own time, but there is a grander thing to yearn for than rest—that is victory." Not to escape from pain, but to bear it bravely, not to avoid the soldier's life, the long march over rough roads, leading to battle-fields, but to win the soldier's glory, even though it be a death. Victory over self—over low ideals—over false creeds—and false ambitions—victory which shall

make death itself an angel's wing to bear the weary spirit home to God."

I write down briefly some of the points on which he touched, but I cannot give his tones or the surroundings under which he spoke. To Arthur, years after, the scene would come vividly back, like strains of remembered music.

The quiet old church, with the June sunlight streaming in through the open windows, and the soft air bearing on its wings fragrant messages from wild flowers and dewy grass, the attentive faces of the villagers, who had come to feel Ralph's teaching a real and hopeful thing, and the speaker's face with its striking beauty, and strange expression of conquered sadness, stamped themselves indelibly upon his memory.

Not that there was anything new in what Ralph had said. All men who have thought deeply about life have felt some of these truths, many men have uttered them all. But to Arthur they came with more force than a new philosophy

could have done, for they echoed his old convictions, the faith of the chivalrous, enthusiastic hopeful Arthur of five years ago.

He had found at last a man, who had suffered deeply, yet had not despaired, who believed even while his own heart bled with pain, that life was worth having, who held, that viewed in its completeness, it was a great and holy thing.

After the benediction was pronounced, Arthur looked round for the beautiful singer.

And then for the first time he saw Maud Atherton.

He went for a long walk that afternoon, and fought the old question out again.

There was something about the light conventional society with which he had lately mingled and the brilliant superficial literature he had been lately reading, that had always half wearied and disgusted him, but to-day, with his old passionate convictions and dreams reawakened, he turned from them to these higher views, as men

emerge from the close atmosphere of a midnight revel, to the star-lit air of heaven.

To work manfully—to be of some use in the world—to make some life gladder—to attach some hearts in grateful affection to his own—to quit himself manfully, losing self in thought for others in the great battle of life—these were the aims dictated by his reawakened self.

And through all these indistinct dreams of possible achievements, all these resolved renunciations, one other thought would find a place. He smiled at it as irrelevant and absurd, but often as he banished it, it returned again with new sweetness and fresh power.

It was the remembrance of a voice heard that day for the first time, which had touched the life-roots of his being—the memory of a face one glimpse of which had reawakened something of his old passionate belief in womanhood.

CHAPTER IV.

Edgar.— In his eyes
There is the light of genius. E'er the world
Can dim the golden brightness of his hair
He will have sounded mystic depths of thought,
And caught sweet echoes from the Infinite,
As only poets can.

Alice.— Ah me! I fear
He will but breath the prelude of a strain,
The full toned harmony of which will swell
Upon the air of heaven.

THE next morning was cloudy and dull, the heavy air fraught with the prophecy of a storm. Arthur was a passionate enthusiast in art, though his studies therein, like most of his pursuits lately, had been extremely desultory. It occurred to him that some fine cloud studies and effects of

light and shade, might be obtained by the river side.

So having, by Mrs. Tonkin's agency, captured a small boy to carry his easel, he determined to work vigorously by way of a change. The small boy rendered his services under tacit protest, evidently regarding the easel as a piece of diabolical artillery, or unholy instrument of torture, but shillings presenting themselves in his way only on rare occasions, it seemed to him desirable to earn one even at the risk of slightly endangering his soul.

Arthur stopped on an elevated piece of ground where tall trees growing on each side of the river spread their waving boughs above it like a leafy shield.

When the sun was shining, the chief thought it suggested was peaceful restful quiet, but with the dark thunderclouds overhead the stillness was almost unbearable, the river's voice seemed changed and frightened, and all nature to be

waiting in hushed expectation for the coming storm.

Arthur painted for some time wholly absorbed in his surroundings, but presently his mind began to wander to that sweet voice he had heard yesterday for the first time, and Maud's wonderful dark eyes haunted him strangely. Not that he was the least in love with this beautiful girl, but there are some faces of such spiritual power, that a mometary glimpse of them forms an epoch in life. Kate Rushton's face was more faultlessly beautiful than Maud's, yet it awakened passion rather than worship, the one face depended solely on its perfection of tint and outline, the other suggested thoughts above and beyond it.

Arthur had found out at last the actual personality, both of Maud Atherton and Miss Sarah Gloffoggen, and appreciated Walter Medhurst's deception, into which he had been so readily beguiled.

"I will call on Mr. Atherton to night," he said

to himself, "a clergyman whose views are not stereotyped is a refreshing novelty, and then I shall be able to see this village goddess a little closer. By Jove, that must surely be thunder."

The low mutter of distant thunder sounded as he spoke, and a few large drops of rain began to fall. Arthur looked round for some place of shelter, and was relieved to see a small cottage he had not observed before, at no great distance.

A sorrowful looking woman, very plainly and respectably dressed curtsied as he entered, and proceeded according to the time honoured custom of cottagers, to dust a chair that was spotlessly clean with her apron, which she proffered, asking him to sit down as mournfully as if she intended to draw two of his front teeth.

A true gentleman is never more unmistakably known than by his bearing to people socially his inferiors. Arthur spoke to the disconsolate widow, as courteously as if she had been a

countess, though not exactly in the same way. He told her he had been sketching, and asked shelter until the storm had abated.

"Eh, sir," said the woman, "I shall be honoured if you'll sit down for a while in the cottage. It ain't much of a place, sir, for I'm a poor widow-woman, as has to work for her livin', but no one can say it isn't clean." And having thrown out this challenge to the universe in general, with some vivacity, Mrs. Thorby (for that was her name) subsided into despondency and gloom.

Arthur was debating within himself whether he should encourage her to be loquacious on the subject of her sorrows, (evidently a pet theme of hers) when he saw she was not the only inmate of the cottage.

Upon a couch at the other end of the room lay a boy about fourteen years old, but looking much younger. His blue eyes were large and dreamy, his features small and perfect, his mouth refined

and sensitive, and his hair hanging in long golden curls like a woman's.

But the colourless face, and the air of utter weariness told their tale all too plainly. The boy was consumptive, and already the shadow of the Death-angel's wing seemed to have fallen upon him.

But Arthur thought he could read in that girlish face, a deeper meaning than this. Child as he seemed, there was genius expressed in those deep blue eyes.

"Is that your son?" he said with a look of quick surprise at Mrs. Thorby.

"Yes sir, my boy Alfred, my only child." Arthur crossed the room to his side and said kindly to him.

"It must be dull for you lying here."

"It is sometimes," said the boy wearily "but I have books." He pointed as he spoke to a small table by his side, upon which were white roses, and a little pile of books. They were poems mostly,

and Arthur saw the 'Fairy Queen,' 'Paradise Lost,' and 'Shakespeare' among the number.

"Do you read these, Alfred?" he asked in some surprise.

"Yes," replied the boy, "I should often be weary without them—they are my best friends."

Arthur took up the copy of Shakespeare; it opened at 'Romeo and Juliet,' and he saw that many of the passionate words of that wonderful poem were underlined in pencil.

"Are these your marks?" he asked.

A faint flush tinged the boy's cheek as he answered "Yes."

"How old are you?" said Arthur, more surprised than ever.

"I am fourteen," was the reply, "but poets crowd long lives into a few days."

"And are you a poet?"

"I try to be, and I have such strange fancies lying here."

"What kind of fancies?" said Arthur, interested in this strange conversation.

"About all the mystery of everything, and the beauty, and what it all means. Sometimes I have dreadful fancies too—about spirits—and what it would be to be alone in the dark for centuries."

"Are you afraid of the dark?" asked Arthur, catching at the last remark as a half childish one.

"Only because it is like the grave," said the child. "I am dying, and shall soon have lost the light for ever. But I have learnt what life means, young as I am."

"What does it mean?" Arthur's voice sounded almost harsh and bitter, after the child's clear treble tones.

"It means Love," said the golden-haired little dogmatist.

"It means anything but love in the great world," said Arthur. "It means hatred and treachery, it means disappointment and

failure, often it means weariness and disgust."

The child passed his hand wearily over his forehead. "I know nothing about your great world," he said, "but I know that is not life—not what God intended it should be—not what Shakespeare and Milton thought it was—not what I know it is when—"

He checked himself. Arthur looked wonderingly at him, and said—

"And you underlined these words of Romeo's. How can you possibly understand them?"

The boy was silent; but just then Arthur, who was turning the leaves of the book carelessly over, happened to glance at the fly leaf.

Written in a clear bold hand were the words, 'Alfred Thorby, from Maud Atherton,' and when he glanced from the book to the child, he almost started at the transformation. Instead of the pale listless boy of a few minutes before, his little friend lay flushed and excited, with a new light in his large blue eyes.

They were alone together, Mrs. Thorby having gone out of the room. Arthur read the boy's whole history in his face, and child as he felt him to be in years, saw that a man's worship absorbed his soul.

"Is it Miss Atherton who has taught you the meaning of life?" he asked.

The boy struggled with his desire to confide in Arthur.

"You will laugh at me if I tell you," he said.

"No, indeed," returned Arthur quickly," I will do nothing so false. Tell me, do you love her?"

Again the boy was silent for a few moments, but when he spoke it was with the rapid utterance of long-cherished thoughts.

"Love her!" he said passionately, "I worship her. I only live because she does. She is light, music, heaven itself. When I am in pain she comes beside me, and the lightest touch of her little white hand can make me forget everything but love. Have you ever seen her?"

"Once—at church."

"Then you know how beautiful she is. Don't you think Juliet's eyes were like that?"

He went on rapidly without waiting for a reply, "But it is not only her beautiful face. She sings to me sometimes, and then I think she is a syren. It is not like ordinary music at all. And she reads to me and tells me old legends and ballads, and when she talks I think she is an angel—but she is too bright for that. Angels are always sad."

"Always sad," repeated Arthur, fascinated by this fair-headed child's conversation, so unlike anything he had ever heard before.

"How can they be anything but sad, when they see so much sorrow? But one cannot be unhappy when Miss Maud is here. Her laughter is like bells at a fairy bridal—and she so often laughs. Yet once when she thought I was asleep, I saw her eyes were full of tears, and I know they were for me. Once when I had been very weak,

she kissed me, and I have often prayed since for any pain that should bring me the touch of her lips again."

Arthur was silent. Such words seemed strange and unnatural coming from a child, yet he had ceased to be incredulous as to their truth. As he looked at the little flushed face, he thought it was love like this that had brought forth chivalry, and cradled the poets of humanity in her arms.

The child was silent too, exhausted by the effort he had made, and lay watching the storm that had now nearly exhausted its fury.

The rain still fell in torrents, but the lightening flashed at longer intervals. The mountainous clouds were scattering, and a faint streak of golden light, proclaimed that the sunshine had won the victory.

And by way of contrast Mrs. Thorby again made her appearance, having in reality been cooking the dinner, but looking as though she had been making arrangements for her funeral, and

was appalled at the magnitude of the charges.

But her face brightened a little when Arthur said—

"Alfred and I are good friends already, Mrs. Thorby, we have been talking together and quite forgetting the flight of time."

"Eh sir, he's a wonderful boy is my Alfred," (the widow and Arthur were at the end of the room farthest from the child, who could not distinguish their softly spoken words.)

"Where did he learn to talk like that? asked Arthur.

"Like what, sir?"

"About poetical fancies, and books, and—and" (Arthur was going to say, 'and love,' but checked himself,) "and life."

"Well sir, to be sure I don't know who teaches the child such things, unless it's Miss Maud. I never have nothing to do with such outlandish notions myself, for I'm a poor widder woman as has to work hard for her livin'."

"Yes," said Arthur suppressing a tendency to yawn. "You mentioned the circumstance before. Is Miss Atherton liked in the village?"

"Liked sir, there's not a man, woman, or child in the village as wouldn't walk barefoot to Entwich, to do her a service. Only she's a deal to happy for this sinful world. 'Tain't for them as has learned their catechism reg'lar to be always laughin'. If it 'ad been meant for us to be happy, the world would have been made more comfortable like—and there wouldn't have been no such thing as rheumatics. Do you think there would sir?"

Arthur evaded this question, seeing, that it opened up rather a large field for discussion, but incautiously expressed a hope that Mrs. Thorby's views on the subject of "rheumatics," were not based upon any personal experience of them."

Luckless words—they were the 'open sesame' to Mrs. Thorby's soul. She proceeded to pour out a list of her infirmities, physical, social, and

spritual, with long parenthetical digressions on topics of various kinds, such as her regret that so good a man as Mr. Atherton should permit "them Popish surplices," and the agony of soul through which she passed when she nursed her sister's child through the measels, ("which her name was Jemima, named after my own grandmother as was a beautiful woman if she hadn't squinted") concluded the widow with emotion.

Arthur had become excessively bored, and had been looking for a pause, as ship-wrecked mariners watch for the first indication of coming sails.

One thing seemed very strange to him, she was evidently very fond of her boy, and talked with pride about him, but no word did she utter about his sufferings, not a phrase fell from her lips betraying any fear that she might lose him.

The rain had ceased falling, and Mrs. Thorby being out of breath, stopped too. Arthur took advantage of this and said—

"Well Mrs. Thorby, I hope next winter won't be so severe, and then perhaps you'll suffer less. But I must be off—it has left off raining. Good bye Alfred." He went round to shake hands with the child before going. The little fellow held out a hand so thin and wasted, that Arthur almost feared to grasp it firmly. But the small white hand gave his a lingering pressure, as the child looked with a kind of wistful admiration at his face.

"How kind you are" he said softly, adding childishly enough "you are so tall and strong, you can row, and swim, and ride, and play cricket I suppose!"

Arthur nodded assent.

"It must be beautiful to be so strong. Are you always happy?"

"I never met anyone who was," said Arthur, "there is so much disappointment in everything."

"If I were strong I would never talk of disappointment," said the child dreamily.

"What would you do?"

"I would go out into the great world, and fight with wrong, and oppression, and tyranny. Wherever I found anyone sad I would comfort them, and if anyone was poor I would make him rich. Like Spenser's knights, you know, and it should all be as their work was, for the sake of my 'Færie Queene.'"

"Suppose you failed?"

"I should not fail, if I worked for her, but even if I did, she would know that I had struggled bravely, and be glad for it. So you see it would not be failure after all. And then I would write a poem, and she should be the heroine of it. All the world would love her then, for I would tell all about her beautiful eyes, and her sweet voice, and I would write about her bright smile, and the music of her laughter, and then I would speak of the things that are like her."

"What things are like her?"

"Flowers are like her lips, and eyes, and her

voice and tread are music, and her smile is starlight, but I cannot find a simile for her heart. It is most like a river I think, because that carries health and beauty everywhere, and flowers grow round it, and it sings so sweetly, and brings every sunbeam down from heaven to earth, and then beneath its gay and laughing surface, there are depths one cannot sound—but she is more beautiful than that. Good bye sir, what is your name?"

"Arthur Calverley: you must call me Arthur. I must go now, but I will come and see you again if you like."

"Yes do come again" said the child eagerly, "no one listens so kindly to me as you have done except Miss Maud. You will come again soon?"

"Very soon. Good bye Alfred."

"Good bye Arthur," and so they parted.

Arthur went away thoughtfully. Careless and indifferent as he had grown lately, his was one of those characters, which only need a high aim in

life to achieve great things. One of the most hopeful points in his mind, was its utter absence of self-conceit. His views of greatness at his idlest moment were so far above common ideals, that he was in no danger of self-complacently imagining he had attained it. Therefore he was not ashamed to learn wisdom from a child."

And this blue-eyed boy, with his passionate belief in these things, Arthur had begun to doubt had touched all that was noblest in his heart.

"His enthusiasm is the belief of an inexperienced child; a year in London would end all that, "he thought to himself," and yet—no—it would only give place to something better, the strong convictions, and steadfast faith of manhood. Yes—yes—this golden haired baby has unconsciously preached me the second sermon I have heard since I have been here, both unconventional, both inspiring, and both umcomplimentary. Perhaps it's one of the village accomplishments. I wonder if Miss Atherton will preach me a third, she has

very small feet, it would be rather delightful to sit at them."

Perhaps Maud had something better than a sermon for him. Bright eyes are poems, only we men are frequently too dull to read their meaning.

Arthur called that evening at the vicarage, and was received very cordially.

Ralph Atherton was one of the few men who are masters of the lost art of conversation. He talked of art, and science, literature, and politics, without becoming superficial on the one hand, or pedantic on the other. Maud took little share in the discussion at first, but presently she became interested, and freely joined in the conversation. It was interesting to note the difference between father and daughter. Both were earnest in their views, but in Maud this was half hidden by playfulness.

She was rather fond of talking heresy, it was plain, and her sense of humour was keener than her father's, as a certain vein of light-hearted

mockery running through some of her words plainly showed. There was the great gulf too between them of separate life experience. One had suffered deeply, the other had not.

Arthur contrived to turn the conversation to music, and so get an opportunity of hearing Maud sing; and when she did so, he began to understand for the first time Alfred Thorby's reverential homage. Maud was no angel, there was too much mischief in her for that, but her singing afforded new suggestions as to her character. As the low sweet tones of her voice sounded in the dreamy twilight, Arthur thought perhaps her woman's soul was shadowed forth in them, and suspected instinctively that this village girl hid beneath her light words a depth of passionate feeling, of love or hatred, of sacrifice, endurance, and renunciation, such as commonplace maidens, gay and frivolous, or sad-eyed and sentimental, never dreamed of.

And so the first evening at the vicarage passed

quickly away, and Arthur went home to the 'Elm Tree' humming the ballads she had sung, and wondering whether all the poets, artists, sculptors, and musicians in the world could explain the meaning lying hidden in a woman's eyes.

CHAPTER V.

"Then we talked—oh, how we talked! her voice so cadenced in the talking
Made another singing—of the soul, a music without bars,
While the leafy sounds of woodlands, humming round where we were walking,
Made interposition worthy—sweet, as skies above the stars."

Elizabeth Barrett Browning.

A week afterwards Arthur despatched the following note—

"My dear Medhurst,

You will be wondering what effect Elverley has had upon me, physically, morally, and intellectually—whether I have conceived a Platonic attachment for Mrs. Tonkin, or bought

a farm, or eloped with Miss Sarah Gloffoggen. I have dwelt among these guileless natives for nine days, and have 'read, marked, learned, and inwardly' marvelled at everything.

'The Elm Tree' is a phenomenon to begin with. I have had an extensive knowledge of hotels, as you know, in England, on the Continent, and in America, but I never met with anything of the kind before. I dare not expatiate on Mrs Tonkin's cookery, lest crowds of famished tourists should 'come down like a wolf on the fold,' and make her soups and entrées a memory of the golden past. But I forgot—you too have tasted them. Then when I ordered a bottle of wine on the occassion of my first dinner, I of course anticipated port of British manufacture, but the inscrutable Mrs. Tonkin produced a wine that might have had an honoured place in my father's cellars. These items of diet I mention to set your professional mind at rest.

But when I go outside the 'Elm Tree's'

charmed portals, comical wonder gives way to tragical surprise. Miss Sarah Gloffoggen spoke of you in a way that made me tremble for my friend. Beware, oh, unsuspecting Walter, there is such latent power in that woman's right arm, and an umbrella is so useful an instrument of warfare, that even so brave a heart as yours might be married by force, and awake to a ghastly consciousness of the awful fact too late.

Then I have already grown to share your admiration for Ralph Atherton. I could understand the whole story of his beautiful young Italian wife, when I had seen his face; I got the tale in full from a breathless retainer of the family (Name—Sarah. Girth round the waist—several yards.)

I have made another friend here too—a blue-eyed golden-haired boy of fourteen, who I think has genius, and might have been a great poet. But he will carry his weird fancies into the land of shadows, unspoken I fear, for he is in an

advanced stage of consumption. The Doctor here (James Corrie, Esq., M.D., as the *Entwich Times* always calls him,) spoke quite hopelessly of him the other day.

I do not believe in boring friends with descriptions of people they have never seen, but this child has interested me so deeply, that I am transgressing my ordinary rule. The most singular thing about him is that he worships one woman with a wealth of passionate idealistic love, such as I should never have fancied could exist apart from matured manhood. But there are more things in the hearts of children ' than are dreamt of in our (grown-up) philosophy '—and then to poets all things are possible.

Moreover, his divinity is worthy of adoration. It may be unphilosophic to express surprise, but I must confess Miss Atherton, the ogre you described with such wonderful fidelity, has astonished me.

I have had some opportunity of studying her

character, but the subject is a baffling one. Even her beauty is puzzling. It changes so with every wave of feeling, with every pulse of thought. She is no angel, that is clear, but quite faulty enough to entitle her to human interest.

I call her ‘ faulty ’ for lack of a better word, yet it would be hard to name a characteristic she could lose, without detriment to her character as a whole. I could not spare the lighter elements in her disposition, though Miss Gloffoggen calls them frivolous ; they are like ‘ sunshine on the deep sea,’ to borrow an illustration from Carlyle.

Of her temper I am not certain. It is essentially southern, and if roused could I doubt not, be passionate either in love or hate. But like Launce, I am tempted to ‘ take that out of her faults and put it down as the chief of her virtues,’ a slight suggestion of wickedness being positively attractive to my carnal mind.

Do not mistake my meaning, I am not in love with this beautiful sylvan divinity, I have seen

so little of her—and moreover one need be on better terms with oneself than I, to imagine one's heart an offering worthy of such a shrine.

But I confess she has moved me strangely; she has reawakened the old chivalous views of womanhood and life I used to hold, and which I fancied I had lost for ever. With such a woman, beautiful, young, and ardent, to inspire his life, a man might attain to high ends such as under ordinary circumstances would be impossible.

There my dear Walter, you have the symptoms in full. I am afraid to read this letter through lest I should be overwhelmed by a sense of its inconsistency, and (to borrow an expressive Hibernian phrase, I am in a humour for quotation to-night) 'burn it before I send it off.'

Commend me to Brown, Smith and Jones of the great world, and tell them if you like (for they are a numerous and inquisitive race,) that I find neither my digestion nor my spirits materially impaired by their absence—

From this pastoral retreat I subscribe myself,

Faithfully yours,

Arthur Calverley."

Rather more than a week had elapsed since Arthur came to the village, and already he had ceased to be a stranger there. Alfred Thorby had come to regard him in the light of a strong, accomplished, elder brother, whose words were always kind and encouraging, and whose touch was as light as a woman's.

Sometimes Arthur would carry him down to the river side, and tell him stories of his own travels, or thoughts of the great philosophers and poets, while to the boy, sunshine came like life, and he would sit by Arthur's side listening eagerly, or pouring out the weird fancies, and fantastic dreams of his childish imagination. The last two or three days Arthur had especially encouraged him to speak about Maud, and the child would sit watching the river, and uttering his wild enthusiasm till it seemed to Arthur, as

though his life were ebbing away like the sunny rivulet, ever murmuring the name of a woman as it flowed.

Even Mrs. Thorby's face would brighten at Arthur's appearance, and though she still held that ' in this sinful world, folks 'ud a deal better be a cryin' than a laughin',' she had sufficient tolerance of heterodoxy, or womanly appreciation of a handsome face, to derive a gratification, carnally genuine, from his society.

Miss Gloffoggen was less favourably impressed with him. He had expressed a dislike to the idea of women entering parliament, or amputating legs, nay more, this unprincipled young man had joined with Maud in treating the matter as a fantastic joke. This was unpardonable; if Arthur had inserted a carving-knife between two of his father's ribs, or confessed a sympathy with garotters, there might (this discreet lady considered) have been some faint hope for him, but as it was he had fallen ' like Lucifer, never to rise again.'

The villagers all liked Arthur, he went into their cottages, and chatted with them on all the subjects they cared for, with an engaging frankness that had won all their hearts, and I am afraid he must have ruined the digestion of half the juvenile population, by his extensive importation and lavish distribution of hardbake and toffee.

Dr. Corrie, whom Arthur mentioned in his letter to his friend, was a kind-hearted, good-natured, middle-aged man, with no remarkable endowment of mind, or quickness of perception, but atoning for that deficiency by his jovial disposition, and the possession of a young wife—a plump mischievous little gipsy of three-and-twenty.

By them both, Arthur had been most cordially received, but the house where he had spent almost every evening, was the vicarage. Twice he had played chess with Ralph Atherton, the other evenings had been like the first, except that

generally some visitors were there as well as he.

He never saw Maud alone, and had had no opportunity for speaking with her on any but general subjects; the morning after he posted his letter to Walter Medhurst, he sauntered down to the river, thinking how strange it was he never met her out of doors, when he fancied he could see by the river side, a long way lower down the flutter of a white dress.

That was enough—'Westward Ho!' laughed Arthur to himself, and walked rapidly in that direction, like a mariner steering by the stars.

Arthur was not mistaken. Maud was reclining in her favourite attitude, in her usual studio—the old tree, reading. He could not see the book from where he stood watching the play of expression in her face, but evidently it was something that amused her greatly, for her eyes danced with merriment, her sweet red lips constantly broke into smiles, and every now and then he could hear the low ripple of her musical laughter. At

last she sprang lightly from her seat, and flung the book into the river, sending it spinning through the air with considerable dexterity.

"Is that the way you usually treat authors who have the misfortune to displease you, Miss Atherton?" said Arthur, coming forward greatly amused. "Surely moral censure is sufficient without, so to speak, drowning them in effigy."

For once in her life Maud was fairly caught at a disadvantage, but her confusion was only momentary, and she watched the book being carried away by the swiftly flowing tide with genuine amusement.

"I don't feel very guilty," she said laughing, "the offender's crimes were so enormous."

"What were they?"

"You are determined to put me in the confessional. I may as well admit the truth at once I suppose," said Maud gaily. "It was a novel culminating in a love scene. As long as the story confined itself to crime, it was only absurd in the

usual style, but when the hero left off cutting throats, and the heroine abandoned poisoning her relations, they both became maudlin and unbearable, and patience not being my strong point I —but you know the the rest."

"You are a merciless critic," said Arthur, "and yet men and women have not always thought love an absurdity."

Maud looked at Arthur quickly, as though she could say a good deal upon the point, which was precisely the thing he wanted her to do, but she checked herself and answered simply—

"I wasn't talking of love at all, but hysterical sentiment."

"Then you believe in love," he said half playfully, but with an earnest desire too, to know what this dark-eyed girl would say in reply.

Maud met the question lightly, and made a laughing answer, but after he had pressed his point two or three times, that quick look of resolute conviction he had already noticed passed over her face, and she said—

"Yes—profoundly—but as strength, not weakness."

The morning was so bright, and the shade of the trees so delicious from the hot July sun, that Maud and Arthur walked by the river-side a much longer time than either had intended.

And Arthur learnt—for the first time in his life, it almost seemed to him—what the power of a woman's conversation could be. He had known lovely girls before of course, though not quite of Maud's style of beauty, but they had mostly talked about the opera, the parties of the season, and the faults of their friends—varying this style of discussion by flirtations, in which their indifference to other hearts, was only equal to their control over their own.

He had known the sentimental class too—the sweet young things, who wrote odes to the moon, cried at the sight of a violet, and generally wound up by marrying a wealthy soap-boiler.

And he knew very well that interesting race of

maidens, called 'clever young ladies,' quick-witted girls for the most part, who might under proper training have been charming, but who by systematic 'cramming' had been reduced to a mechanical existence, comprising a smattering of arts, sciences, and general information, paraded on every occasion, causing envy among rivals, and ineffable boredom among friends.

And he knew literary women of the Miss Gloffoggen type, great in statistics, profound in science, gigantic in mathematics, and untidy in dress, but a girl like Maud Atherton had never crossed his life before.

In a desultory and erratic fashion, she had studied much; many an old poet and forgotten dramatist had played a part in the formation of her views, yet even when talking of such things, her words knew no touch of pedantry, her perceptions were so quick, her discrimination so delicate, her views frequently so original and striking, that Arthur listened as though her words were a posi-

tive revelation to him, and so in truth they were —a revelation of the fathomless depth of pure-hearted womanhood.

I shall not write here all they said to one another that sweet July morning. Words attain deeper and holier meaning when they fall from a fair woman's lips, and are made musical by the girlish eloquence of a sweet voice.

But they talked together, sometimes lightly, sometimes almost sadly, on varied themes of more or less depth of interest, while the little river flowed musically at their feet, like the murmuring accompaniment to a song.

To Arthur all this was quite a new sensation, for he was conscious (quite independantly of his admiration) of a strange and subtle sympathy between his nature and hers. The wise ones of our time tell us, that all this admits of material explanation, and may possibly go on to prove that human agony is merely owing to a disordered liver, and that heroism is the logical sequence to

a healed brain. But call it what you will—the quivering of a nerve, or the consciousness of a soul, there is something instinctive in our natures, that tells with unerring truth when hearts are in harmony with our own.

It is so even in friendship. I have known Smith longer than I have known Brown. He is quite as good a man, as kind-hearted, as well informed, and much better looking. His views are more like mine than Brown's, whose political ideas are frantic and hysterical, yet I have never exceeded courtesy with Smith, while Brown knows where I keep those faded rose-leaves, and why the secret drawer in my desk contains a long tress of nut-brown hair—and in love, these inarticulate sympathies are far more keenly felt. Perhaps the great scientific teachers may come some day to admit, that the human heart is rather a singular and erratic contrivance after all.

But time is too old a fellow to care for these things, and while he lingers gloatingly over the

hours of sorrow and despair, his flight is rapid enough, when we poor mortals snatch a sunbeam or two from Eden.

This is trite, for every one has felt it. Probably you, reader, could name a few hours in this sorry tragedy of life, when you half renounced your old thoughts of it, and were nearly convinced that the world was a very bright and delightful place after all. But time fled on enchanted pinions and soon—ah, much too soon, June sunshine became November fog.

Maud blushed, (a rare thing for her) when the church clock struck one.

"How late it is," she said, "I must go home Mr. Calverley, or I shall be too late for lunch."

They walked together to the vicarage, and Arthur was saying 'good bye' at the gate, when Sarah came out, and breathlessly remarked that Mr. Atherton wanted to speak to him. So they went into the house together.

"What a colour Miss Maud have got," said the

old nurse to herself with a satisfied chuckle, "well, he's a likely young fellow, and a real gentleman. I could be very well content if they was to marry, there's nobody else I ever see good enough for her."

When Arthur entered the drawing-room, he found Ralph Atherton was not alone. Sir Herbert Stansfeld and his sister Agnes being engaged in playing the game with him of conversational commonplace, so dear to Mrs. Grundy's soul.

Sir Herbert was a young man of eight and twenty, with broad estates, ample revenues, and a recently gained seat in parliament.

Match-making mothers had showered smiles and compliments upon him, innocent daughters utterly unconscious of any ulterior object, had simpered, strummed, and sighed for his special behoof, but he was still a bachelor, and who should become Lady Stansfeld was yet unknown.

I can only describe Sir Herbert by negatives, it being much easier to say what he was not than

what he was. He was not bad-looking, ungentlemanly, or ignorant. There was no stain upon his character, no reproach upon his name. He had never done anything worth mentioning, and therefore as a necesssary corollary, he had never done anything particularly wrong. He had no particular views, no intense sympathies, no passionate beliefs; and when I proceed to speak of his mind I am compelled at the risk of tautology to employ another negative, and say that he was not a fool.

Two pronounced characteristics he indeed possessed—amiability and self-conceit; but even these were fixed ideas rather than active ones. He was amiable because having no intense feelings it was not easy to ruffle him; he was conceited because it was his most cherished conviction, that he was a very superior specimen of humanity.

Yet his conceit was never positively offensive, for he rarely asserted himself unduly, holding that his importance was too obvious a fact to need enunciation, just as it would be superfluous

to proclaim that the angles at the base of an isosceles triangle are equal, or to beseech men to believe that the whole is greater than a part.

His sister Agnes was a pale slight girl of twenty, with small eyes and an irresolute nose, that might be called Grecian or 'snub' according to the strength of light upon the feature in question, and the breadth of the spectator's charity.

I should like to say something of her character, for I am taking the reader behind the scenes of my life-theatre, showing him where the actors are weak, pointing out the raggedness of the scenery, and frankly admitting the hole in the green-baize curtain. But in this case he must form his own conclusions, for beyond boarding-school accomplishments and ideas, I could never detect more than one trait in what for politeness sake I will call her character.

She was 'engaged!'

And this fact was painfully evident to every one. Girls, she bored with endless discussions

about the devotion of her future husband, Leonard West, who I believe had red hair and an eternal smile. Men she regarded as beings of a different order to herself, to be treated with icy courtesy—to be tried by Leonard's standard—found wanting—and disregarded.

After a few common-place remarks, Sir Herbert said—

"Agnes and I want to prevail on you, Mr. Atherton, to come over to Alnaith Castle to-morrow or the next day for a pic-nic—and Miss Atherton of course—perhaps Mr. Calverley would honour us too."

Arthur bowed, he had rapidly decided that the Baronet was a bore, but the idea of a day with Maud was too fascinating to be lost.

"You are very kind to think of us," said Ralph, "well I have not been feeling well lately, a little quiet would do me good, and I can see by your eyes you would like it, Maud," he said watching her heightened colour, and wondering what had

made her look so beautiful that morning.

"I think it would be delightful," she replied, "the ruins are very beautiful, and 'I know a bank whereon' a cloth might be laid without vulgarising the scenery, or getting burnt by the sun—and oh, by the way, that reminds me—"

"What does," said Miss Stansfeld, who disliked enthusiasm as unlady-like.

"Quoting Shakespeare," said Maud, "don't you remember papa, how we all read Twelfth Night last summer, why not do something like it this time?"

"If I may venture to second that proposal," said Arthur, "I do so. The idea seems a great one."

He was thinking how Maud would read, and how those wonderful eyes of hers would give a new meaning even to the greatest of English poets.

Sir Herbert also approved, he prided himself upon his reading, and thought it would make a

favorable impression upon Maud. Miss Stansfeld agreed because she had no individual feeling whatever on the subject.

So Maud's proposal was carried unanimously, the only question being what play they should select.

After naming two or three and rejecting them, they appealed to Arthur for a suggestion.

"July is too hot, and the country too peaceful for tragedy," he said, "ruins are suggestive of the fanciful and ideal. Why not read the Midsummer Night's Dream"?

"Excellent," said Maud gaily, "and for you, Mr. Calverley, there shall be the part of Nick Bottom, the weaver."

"Miss Atherton," he said laughing, "that is really too bad. The shock to my vanity is terrific."

"Not at all," said Maud mischievously, "'you can play no part but Pyramus: for Pyramus is sweet-faced man—a proper man as one shall see

in a summer's day—a most lovely gentleman-like man; therefore you must needs play Pyramus.' "

So after a little more discussion, the day after the morrow was fixed for the pic-nic, and the usual necessary arrangements made, after which they all separated, the Stansfelds driving home to Elverley Hall, and Arthur walking to the 'Elm Tree.'

Miss Stansfeld was thinking of Leonard's superiority to Arthur, and mentally deciding that red hair was preferable to black.

Sir Herbert was thinking Maud had grown much more beautiful since he saw her last, and asking himself if he would not be acting prudently if he made her Lady Stansfeld.

Arthur was recalling all the words she had spoken, and deciding that Elverley, was the most fascinating spot upon the habitable globe.

Maud was thinking——

Patience; her thoughts shall be revealed in time.

CHAPTER VI.

"What was I that I should love her, save for competence to pain."

Elizabeth Barrett Browning.

ALNAITH was a village lower down the river, about fifteen miles from Elverley, and the Castle was a fine ruin, made interesting by a thousand stories, historical and legendary, of the days of old.

Pic-nics are not sublime occasions, yet the tourists who came to Alnaith, found substantial pleasure in roaming about the ivied ruins, and hearing the old traditions over again. It gave an added flavour to champagne, it imparted a

deeper meaning to pigeon-pie, it even added a romantic charm to a flirtation, if the hearers happened to be still in their teens, and susceptible to the influence of sentiment.

Now and then a visitor would come, who not being an excursionist, really cared for those crumbling pillars and decaying turrets, for the sake of the mighty past, and would linger among them lovingly, as though fancy, like a herald's trumpet, could summon again brave knights with streaming banners and glittering lances, ready for the touch of death, if it won a smile from the bright eyes that watched them. But visitors with such vagrant fancies, were rarities, and were usually succeeded by enterprising cockneys, who made rapid mental calculations as to the probable financial success of razing the ruins, and building a sausage-factory in their stead.

It was a favourite place for pic-nics, as it abounded in shady-walks, and grassy knolls,

where Edwin could press Angelina's hand, without being observed by Angelina's excellent but irritable parents, who were generally divided between a profound enjoyment of cold fowl and iced wines, and a misgiving that their noses were peeling under the influence of the sun.

It may seem strange however, that Sir Herbert Stansfeld who knew the ruins well, should have proposed to spend the day there, in company with his own sister, a clergyman and that gentleman's daughter. His motives however are easily explained. He had grown rather tired of a bachelor's life, he was rich, he expected to be made a great deal of by his political party, he was much respected in the county—only one thing remained to make him the ideal of a country gentleman, and that something was a wife.

Already, as I have said, mothers with marriageable daughters, had kindly endeavoured to meet this difficulty. But Sir Herbert had resisted all enticement, and was still undecided upon whom

the unspeakable honour should be conferred.

A year before, he had began to think of marrying Maud, and he had found the idea an extremely pleasant one; when he returned from London, after his election, he found her still more beautiful, and had suggested this pic-nic, as affording opportunity for further observation and final decision.

He was not the least in love with Maud Atherton. He chose her as he chose his hounds and horses; on the ground of suitability. She was beautiful, young, of good family, and being clever would be able, he thought, to talk to cabinet ministers and talented guests, thereby proclaiming to the world, that he was as good a judge of a woman, as he was admitted to be of farming land. 'She has rather too much spirit,' he thought in regretful parenthesis, but marriage would soon 'cure all that.' The possibility of a refusal never crossed his mind.

He knew nothing about Maud's fortune, and

would not perhaps have been greatly influenced by the fact, even if he had known it. He was not mean or covetous, and was quite rich enough already. What he wanted was a wife, and Maud appeared the most attractive article the matrimonial market could afford.

The day for the pic-nic was brilliantly fine, as though it had been intended for Italy, or a sunny isle of the far East, and had come to England by mistake, just as a sonnet for Mabel who is seventeen, may be carried by a stupid messenger to her aunt Jemima, who is sixty-seven.

The Stansfelds brought a young lady who was staying with them, a rather pretty girl of nineteen, whose most prominent characteristics were sentiment, and pink ribbons, both of which she displayed somewhat excessively. Pic-nics have one feature in common with babies, to those personally concerned in them, they are of deep and varied interest, but to the great mass of men one pic-nic (and one baby) bears a striking resemblance to all others.

So I shall not describe minutely, the early part of the day—the long dusty journey, sweetened by the fragrant summer breeze, or the meadows in which wild flowers nestled, and birds made the air ring with music, nor shall I adopt the American style, and transcribe a confectioners' *ménu* at full length, dwelling lovingly on fruits and jellies, and becoming pathetic on the subject of pies. The conversation was desultory—sometimes general upon village matters, but oftener upon themes of private interest. The sweet young thing in the pink ribbons spoke about first love, Sir Herbert became eloquent on the subject of politics and the coming harvest, Miss Agnes was only deterred by consummate diplomacy from reading aloud a long letter she had received that morning from Leonard West.

Ralph Atherton talked with each on his or her pet subject, and led the general conversation with a vivacity very unlike his usual quiet and subdued manner. But Maud's spirits were at their wildest

height; she persuaded the young lady in pink ribbons (whose name was Arabella Clare) to recite an original poem, entitled 'The hero of my girlish dreams,' she wickedly lured Agnes on to read extracts from her love-letter as a compromise, and received Sir Herbert's formal compliments, with a mock humility, faintly tinged with good humoured sarcasm. This he failed, however, to see, and greatly approved of her good taste and common sense.

Arthur watched her as narrowly as he could without observation; there was something very fascinating he thought in her words, even when she talked nonsense.

The delicious nonsense of a beautiful girl defies reproduction. To write it down in cold blood would give about as fair a conception of it, as a Hebrew translation of one of Tom Hood's punning ballads would convey of the original to the average Jewish mind.

After lunch they strolled about the ruins, pair-

ing off—Sir Herbert with Maud, Ralph Atherton with Miss Stansfeld, and Arthur with the emotional Miss Clare.

The last mentioned young lady gave such alarming symptoms of becoming tearfully maudlin, and was in a state so positively effervescent with sentiment, that Arthur manœuvred to bring the whole party together again, which he succeeded in doing, to Sir Herbert's annoyance and Maud's relief.

His pretext was the Shakesperian reading from which he laughingly quoted—

"'Here's a marvellous convenient place for our rehearsal: this green plot shall be our stage, this hawthorn brake our trysting house.' Are you all ready?"

He had selected the shadiest and grassiest spot beside the Castle's western wall, a few yards from the outskirts of a forest, and commanding a view of the swiftly gliding Elva.

"Oberon and Titania might dance upon so green

a sward," said Maud, sitting on the grass beside her father.

And then Arthur could almost have fancied himself in fairy-land as they began to read that sweetest utterance of a great soul.

Ralph Atherton took the part of Lysander, Sir Herbert that of Demetrius, Miss Stansfeld read (rather coldly) the words of poor Helena, and Miss Clare was as sentimental as usual in her rendering of Hippolyta.

Maud took the double part of Titaniæ and Hermiæ, and Arthur sat down resignedly, to become as much as possible like Nick Bolton, the enchanted weaver. The remaining characters were divided among them according to the exigences of the scene.

Who has not revelled in that wonderful play, whereby Shakespeare's kingly genius conferred immortality on the beings of fairy-land, and in which with royal disregard of artistic effect and actual probabilities, he forsakes every guide but

fancy, and renounces all philosophy but love.

Of course the dramatic interests lay mainly between Ralph, Maud and Arthur. I have already spoken of Mr. Atherton's reading. He sustained Lysander's part with great expression and beauty, uttering his exquisite love-words with an appreciation of their meaning which made Arthur's face flush as he looked at Maud. Sir Herbert and his sister were tame, and Miss Clara too gushing, but Arthur brought out the dry humour of his part, with great success.

And Maud?

I am not sure that her reading of the characters she sustained would have been considered by dramatic critics a correct one, but I fancy she might have stirred some doubt in their minds whether orthodoxy commonly so called is quite infallible, even in dramatic art.

Hermiæ and the Queen of the Fairies.

The two characters so unlike, seemed in her reading to combine and display the beautiful

inconsistency of a woman's nature, the mind wayward, fanciful and erratic, but pure, beautiful and true, of Maud Atherton.

She did not believe in Titaniæ's love at all; that was clear. The potent juice of that enchanted flower might delude her into fancying she loved, but the depths of her nature were unmoved. When she praised the weaver's wisdom, when she bade her fairies minister to him, when she twined flowers around the ass's head, there was a comical consciousness pervading it all, that she was under a spell which an hour could chase away. But when she became Hermiæ, her whole bearing and manner changed. She had a woman's love to portray now, and she acted with a resolution and passion, that almost rose into tragedy from the suppressed intensity of feeling every word conveyed.

I say acted, for though she scarcely moved, indulged in no dramatic gesture whatever, and rarely raised her voice above its usual low soft

tones, her vocal inflections were so musical, her earnestness so intense, that Arthur listened as though he had never heard one of those words before.

It was well for him that like Maud, he almost knew his part, without referring to the book, or his furtive scrutiny of Maud's face must have been observed. It was such a fascinating face to watch, there was nothing statuesque in its beauty, for it changed with every alternation of feeling, now sparkling with merriment, now shaded with sadness, now passionate with determination.

Arthur thought of Spenser's beautiful words—

> " A sweet attractive kind of grace,
> A full assurance given by looks,
> Continual comfort in a face,
> The lineaments of Gospel books.
> I trow that countenance cannot be
> Whose thoughts are legible in the eye."

And he wondered if Sir Philip Sydney's face explained their meaning half so well as Maud's did.

At last the play was finished, and 'Moonshine and Lion were left to bury the dead.'

They returned home as they had come, Mr. Atherton and the girls in the carriage, Arthur and Sir Herbert following on horseback.

The baronet and Arthur scarcely exchanged a word, each being fully occupied by his own thoughts—but rode side by side as if unconscious of each other's existence.

In their different ways each was thinking about Maud, but here the similarity ceased. Sir Herbert had decided that she should be his wife, and was drawing ideal pictures of their future life. He, richer and more respected than ever, a member of the Cabinet, perhaps, admired and envied by his friends, she—submissive and admiring in the background, doing the honours of his house as hostess, never advancing any unpleasant views of her own, but devoted to her husband, and caring for no society but his.

Arthur was thinking of Alfred Thorby's pas-

sionate worship of Maud, which had new meaning for him now. To love her, to treasure her every word and look, to offer one's homage as sacrifice, without thought of any return, this seemed the wisest course. To marry her seemed an ambition too high to dare to hope for, and yet the Gods were generous sometimes: what if this woman's heart, with its many contradictions, and its unsounded depths, its true instincts and womanly strength could be won for his own? The thought made his heart beat faster, as something whispered it was not impossible; and then fancies rose before him too, of a great and noble future. What could he not do, with her love to sustain and inspire him, work accomplished, sorrow endured, victories gained, his sterile past becoming a fruitful future; the vision seemed a mirage, too beautiful for truth; he dared not cheat his heart with such sweet hope as that.

And so the summer days flowed on till he had been in Elverley a month, then he no longer

denied the truth to himself, he loved this girl, passionately, earnestly, devotedly, with the worship few hearts can offer, and no heart can give more than once.

Three years before, he had fancied he loved Kate Rushton, but it had never been so ; he had loved her beauty with all the passion of an artist's nature, but the soul he fancied hers, had no existence save in his boyish imagination. It was not that she had changed from the woman he had loved to one with trivial thoughts, low aims, and selfish aspirations, it was sadder than that, for he knew she had never been anything else. But Maud stirred far deeper feelings and awoke a truer love.

And while he was thinking thus, the love he yearned for was already his.

Maud was naturally affectionate, and gave kindly regard with no sparing hand.

But the depths of her nature were not easily stirred. Arthur was young, handsome, accom-

plished, and clever, but this alone would never have gained for him an entrance to the sanctuary of her heart.

But she saw below all this, and recognised with true womanly instinct, the latent power of heroism that slumbered within him. His passionate enthusiasm—so rarely evoked, yet so strong when it manifested itself, his fearless contempt for commonly tolerated wrong, his chivalry towards weakness, all these characteristics had been nullified by his aimlessness, and indecision.

It seemed a high ambition to Maud to take up these tangled threads of life, and unravel them by her touch. He would be earnest enough if he loved anything intensely, she thought; and she longed as only a woman can, to be the one thing his nature needed.

One evening when Arthur was at Dr. Corrie's house, that gentleman's plump little wife attempted to elicit something like confidence from him.

"Don't you think Miss Atherton very beautiful Mr. Calverley?" she enquired demurely.

Arthur quietly assented, but without emphasis, not being in a communicative mood.

"I think she's wonderful," Mrs. Corrie continued, not at all discouraged, "when I look at her eyes and hair, I become positively frantic with envy, its a wonder I've not smashed every looking-glass in the house."

"Possibly your self-denial may not have been equal to the demand upon it," said Arthur, "what do you say, Dr. Corrie?"

"I say that she is a conceited little puss, to think of comparing herself to Miss Atherton," said the doctor, looking lovingly at his wife. "Miss Maud is very beautiful, but I fear there's trouble in store for her."

"Trouble," said Arthur, quickly, "in what way?" "Mr. Atherton will not live long," said Dr. Corrie gravely, "probably not many months, and it would almost break the poor child's heart to lose him."

The doctor (who had been smoking with Arthur) took his cigar from his mouth to say these words, and at their conclusion, smoked for some seconds in silence.

Arthur waited impatiently for him to go on, the watchful little woman noticed that though he affected to be unconcernedly blowing the feathery ash from his cigar, he did it nervously and his hand trembled.

"Yes," resumed the doctor reflectively, "it would be a sad thing if she were left an orphan, that codicil to old Sir James Atherton's will provides for her, however."

"What codicil?" said Arthur carelessly, the mere fact of Maud possessing a few hundred pounds being nothing to him.

"Don't you know it?" said the other, "well it has been kept very quiet, but it can't be a secret much longer. Old Sir James quarrelled with his favourite son, Ralph, at the time of his marriage, you know, but he relented when his

wife died, and left a large sum of money to his infant daughter, Maud. The sum was to accumulate at compound interest, I forget how much it originally was, but I know it will be over a hundred thousand pounds, by the time she's one-and-twenty. And then—but what's the matter Calverley, are you ill?"

Arthur had risen suddenly, and was looking at James Corrie with a face so white that he thought Arthur would faint away, but he recovered himself by a strong effort, and said—

"It—it is nothing—I shall be better presently —I—I think it must be the heat of the room."

And after a few minutes more constrained conversation, during which he made replies at random, to all that was said, Arthur said 'good night,' and walked rapidly home.

"You stupidest of darlings," said Mrs. Corrie to her husband as the door closed after him, "do you see what you've done?"

"No," he replied in an astonished tone, "I see

nothing but very extraordinary behaviour on young Calverley's part."

"You delightful old duffer," said his wife irreverently, "you might have guessed he was in love with Maud, when he thought she was as poor as he, but now you've blurted it out about her fortune, I suspect his pride will ride rampant over everything."

"How do you know all this," said her husband, "did he tell you?"

"Do you imagine we women are all as stupid as you men?" enquired the little woman with an emphatic toss of her head. "I only hope Maud is not in love with him too, as I should have been in her place—women's hearts are easier to break and harder to repair than men's."

With which sententious aphorism, this subject ceased.

Arthur walked rapidly till he was out of sight of the house, he wanted to be alone and think, to recover his lost self-possesion, and to decide upon a course of action.

The doctor's words had stabbed him like a sword thrust, only now when renunciation seemed imperative, did he fully recognise how fondly he had cherished this broken dream.

The moon shone brightly on the village church, where he had seen her first. In Arthur's excited mood there seemed companionship in that grey old building—he walked into the churchyard to think out the questions that were baffling him.

"A mere love story," cries my critic Jones, scornfully elevating a nose already gifted by beneficient nature, with heavenward aspiration. "A mere love story, who cares for such rubbish as that?"

The history of the world began with a love scene, surely my poor story may do the same.

Moreover Jones, there was once a time when these things were not quite meaningless even to you; your divinity was not a peerless one, malicious rumour speaks of her in connexion with red hair and a squint, but be that as it may, the

feeling you are ashamed of now, was a true one Jones, and when you buried it (more sorrowfully than you will admit) you buried with it a thousand possibilities for the loss of which aldermanic banquets cannot quite atone.

So I am not deterred by the prospect of Jones's criticism, but write down Arthur's thoughts as they struggled though his mind that night, the moonlight, the old church and the white graves, so still and peaceful, his own heart so full of passionate unrest.

He thought about her as he had seen her, always beautiful and true-hearted, he thought of all the longings for higher achievement she had awakened, the new faith in womanhood she had aroused, the inspiration to effort her love could be, and his whole soul cried out 'I cannot relinquish the hope of winning her.'

But then his new knowledge arose to crush out hope. She had seemed far enough away from him when he fancied her poor, but now it seemed

treacherous to think of striving for her love.

For peoples opinion he cared nothing, his own pride was harder to vanquish, still he might have conquered that, but his stern sense of honour was invincible.

He had no right, he argued to himself, to ask for this girl's hand in marriage, seeing she was endowed not only with all that can make womanhood beautiful, but with wealth as well, while he had nothing to give in return but love.

Arthur walked rapidly through and through the churchyard until the night was late, and good Mrs. Tonkin began to wonder nervously what had become of him.

He came home at last, determined to relinquish all thought of winning Maud Atherton for his wife.

But with all his resolution he could not decide on leaving Elverley.

CHAPTER VII.

" I fain would write it down here like the rest ;
To keep it in my eyes, as in my ears,
The heart's sweet scripture to be read at night
When weary, or at morning when afraid,
And lean my heaviest oath on when I swear—
That when all's done, all's tried, all's counted here,
All great arts and all good philosophies.
This love just puts its hand out in a dream,
And straight outstretches all things."

Elizabeth Barrett Browning.

" Maud, are you willing to become a receiver of stolen goods ? "

The speaker was pretty little Mrs. Corrie, about a week after her husband's communication to Arthur, mentioned in the last chapter.

" It is too bad to impale me on the horns of a dilemma in that fashion " said Maud, laughing, " I must either confess to a crime, or suffer the pangs of unsatisfied curiosity. What's the matter? Have you been stealing, and do you want to make me an accessory after the fact? "

" That's about the truth of the matter," said Mrs. Corrie, composedly sitting as comfortably as possible on the sofa, (they were talking together in the vicarage dining-room.) " That's exactly the state of affairs; only don't pretend to be innocent, those little hands of yours have been stealing, before I entered the profession."

" I have no thefts on my mind," said Maud laughing, " except some remembered plunderings of jam, and that was fourteen years ago, so I consider myself absolved on that score: what else have I been stealing? "

" Hearts—men's hearts, but don't blush, Maud, that kind of filching only comes under the head of petty larceny."

"A paltry riddle," said Maud, "I hope your thefts are more interesting."

"I have only one to confess," said the little woman with an important air, "but wait till you hear what it is, and then we'll see if your tell-tale face does not betray confidence. It is about Mr. Arthur Calverley."

Maud tried to look indifferent with rather poor success.

"Well you must know that he and I have become great friends, and the other day, I persuaded him to show me his portfolio of sketches, and I tried desperately hard to talk 'art,' as though I knew anything about it."

"What is that paper in your hand?" asked Maud.

"Don't interrupt, you shall see directly. Well we looked over the sketches together, and great fun it was. A most miscellaneous collection he had, landscapes, heads, copies of statuary, pen and ink caricatures, all sorts of things, but sud-

denly I noticed him change colour, and put one sketch at the bottom of them all, so that I couldn't see it. Of course I asked what it was, and equally of course he said it was nothing. Well I'm rather ashamed of the rest of the story, but my womanly curiosity was piqued, and I contrived to upset the port-folio."

"You don't seem at all penitent" said Maud, not finding it easy to refrain from laughing.

"Penitence is no word for my feelings," said Clara Corrie gravely, "I suffer the pangs of remorse, but I must finish my story—I helped him to pick up the drawings, of course I managed to get hold of the mysterious sketch, intending to glance at it, and put it back. But he was too quick for me, and I did not even know what it was till after he had gone."

"What was it?" said Maud.

"Ah, ha," laughed Clara, "conniving at crime, I find I'm not so much worse than other people after all, here it is, look for yourself."

It was a water colour sketch of Maud, as the queen of the Fairies. Arthur had taxed his artistic powers to the utmost to do justice to his subject, and probably he had never succeeded so well in his life. Not only was it faithful in detail, and felicitous in shade and colouring, but there was a vividness of power in the drawing that showed how lovingly the artist had lingered upon his theme.

Maud observed it closely, and then looked wonderingly at Clara Corrie, who by this time was reclining at full length upon the sofa, looking the incarnation of mischief.

"When you have done admiring your own face," said that lady demurely, "(and by the way the likeness is much too flattering) I advise you to look at the other side."

On the other side, in Arthur's handwriting, Maud read the following words:—

"The castle walls were grey and old,
And scarred with many an ancient fight,

Beside them in the morning light,
The blue waves of the river rolled.

The sunlight through the casement streamed,
Upon a fairer sweeter face,
Of girlish truth and queenly grace,
Than loftiest poet ever dreamed.

Queen of a fair and loyal land,
Her name was honoured far and wide,
And kingly suitors lost their pride,
In humble pleading for her hand.

"Tell me brave knights," she gaily said,
"What is the noblest thing on earth,
Of truest wealth and highest worth,
On which the moon her light has shed?

I long for something fairer far,
Than morning blush of rosy light,
Than white winged rose, or jewel bright,
And changeless as a shining star!"

From out that gay and knightly throng,
There stepped a warrior brave and old,
Whose lofty prowess still is told,
In poet's page and minstrel's song.

"Though earth is rich in gems," he said,
"The silent stars look coldly down
On faded rose and tarnished crown,
On broken faith and fancies dead.

If there be aught that can endure
The disenchanting touch of Time,
It is a spirit-gift sublime,
And with diviner beauty pure.

Once o'er a civil battle field,
Earth's guardian-angel sadly gazed
On dying hands to heaven upraised,
On shattered lance and broken shield.

Few sadder sights hath this sad life
Than brother by a brother slain:
Hands parted ne'er to clasp again,
Or meeting but in deadly strife.

The pitying angel held her crown
Of mystic beauty high in air,
With tender thought, and murmured prayer,
She flung its starry jewels down.

To earth the diamonds were given,
That in this wild and weary strife
Of pride and passion—men call life—
They yet might hold one touch of heaven.

Upon the battle field they fell,
And now they bear a crimson stain,
Which brings a sudden touch of pain,
Or so the old traditions tell.

Yet all the treasure of the earth,
Though heaped in gaudy lustre high,

From valley's breast, to touch the sky,
Beside such gems were nothing worth.

For each has power from heaven to still
The restless cravings of the soul,
The dreams too eager for control,
The yearnings of a fettered will.

And though it cannot cause to cease,
The bitter flow of sorrow's tears,
Yet, through the agony of years
It brings life's fairest blessing—peace."

Then smiled the queen, "I vow," said she,
"A king's dominion o'er my land,
My maiden heart and queenly hand,
Are his who brings that gem to me."

A rose-bud, as a snowflake white,
From out her hair's abundant wave
She took to seal her troth, and gave
A petal fair to every knight.

They sought through many lands in vain,
In castle grey, in lordly hall,
In mountains where the torrents fall,
With voice like wailing cry of pain,

'Till some grew weary, and resigned
The search, since all their hopes were dead—
The gems were but a dream, they said—
The visions of a fevered mind.

But one there was of lowly name,
Who would not coldly yield his trust,
Of faith too true to turn to dust,
Of soul too pure to harbour shame.

He turned from civic wealth and pride,
And folded in a valley's mist,
Where simple flowers, by dewdrops kissed,
Blushed at the love the soft wind sighed,

He found a rustic cottage wound
In close embrace by ivy green,
And smiling through the leafy screen
Upon the hills that stood around.

He raised the latch; nor song, nor word,
Nor sound of life the silence broke,
The thrushes from the trees of oak,
Alone the voiceless sorrow stirred.

Upon a couch in fitful sleep,
He saw a girl of beauty rare,
But pale the cheek oft called so fair,
And all unbound the golden hair—
Her mother knelt beside her there
With eyes too sorrowful to weep.

She told the knight, with trembling voice,
How once her Alice was the pride
Of all the vale. At eventide
Her beauty made the stars rejoice.

But came a rider, one dark hour
From cities where the stream of life
Flows with the brawling voice of strife—
He came to steal the valley flower.

With tender word and knightly oath
He wooed fair Alice for his bride,
And there upon the mountain side,
The two clasped hands and plighted troth.

Time passed—he left her. From afar,
Come tidings that the royal hand
In anger banished him the land,
Yet still her faith shone like a star.

A darker rumour came one night,
Of broken lance and sullied fame,
That men shrank from him in his shame,
But never faltered love's pure light.

And then came silence for a while,
Worse than the stillness of the dead;
The moon a chilly lustre shed,
On trembling lips that tried to smile.

And lastly came a cold farewell,
That jarred each nerve with thrill of pain,
Her brave heart broke beneath the strain,
Pierced by the hand she loved so well.

And now although her laboured breath
Showed that she neared the golden gate:

The love that conquered shame and hate
Rose proudly victor over death.

And with his name upon her tongue,
Her soul on angel-wings rose free
Above the waves of life's wild sea,
And heard love's anthems fitly sung.

While lying on the placid breast
That never more should throb with pain,
A diamond with blood-red stain
Shone like the quiet soul at rest.

The knight beheld the starry gem,
And kissing once the cold lips dead—
"Not one, but many gems" he said
In heaven light her diadem.

This jewel, with the crimson stain,
Must shine upon a living breast,
That glories in its peace and rest,
And does not tremble at its pain.

He bore it to his queen, to shine
With spirit-lustre never pale,
With light of hope too pure to fail,
To flood her soul with strength divine.

And in the after years, no more
Could aught their wedded spirits part,
She held the jewel to her heart,
While he the white rose petal wore.

That diamond's bright name is Love,
Not that which flickers like a spark,
Then quivers into utter dark,
But steadfast as the stars above.

Through time and sorrow, doubt and care,
Unquenched it burns with gleaming light,
And ever in the darkest night,
It sheds its holy radiance fair.

So rarely earth has seen it shine,
Yet sometimes by the fitful gleam
Of dying day, I dare to dream
The wondrous talisman is mine.

Is mine, although my soul is tossed
Upon the waves of passion's sea
And often life seems vain to me,
While Faith gropes blindly and is lost.

Time cannot dim it or destroy,
I wear its spirit-light concealed,
But wear it ever, nor would yield
Its sorrow for the proudest joy.

And when is calmed this wayward will,
This proud heart hushed to beat no more,
Life's haven gained, and sorrow o'er,
When every quivering nerve is still,

In the celestial city, trod
By angels, I shall wear again

That jewel with no thought of pain,
And purified from crimson stain,
For Love is Life—and Heaven—and God."

Maud read the poem with some difficulty, as the paper was not only filled but crossed with writing. Evidently Arthur had commenced with the intention of writing only a few verses, but the legendary fancy had taken strong possession of his mind, and he had found it impossible to compress the idea into smaller space. The verses were faulty enough, and gave surface indication of haste, but a girl does not usually subject an avowal of love to the test of critical analysis. It was sweet to think she had inspired such passionate words, that a man whom she already loved, held her in reverential worship.

It was with a very beautiful flush on her cheek, that she raised her eyes at last, and looked, with an expression in which many feelings were very strangely blended into her companion's face.

Arthur's manner had been cold and constrained

the last week, and she had wondered at the reason, though once she had been on the verge of discovering his secret. They had been talking of Miss Gloffoggen, and Maud had said laughingly, "I have a most unchristian horror of that woman, if Prospero was right when he said 'we are such stuff as dreams are made of' I think she must be the incarnation of a nightmare."

The idea had amused Arthur greatly, and he had sketched a likeness of her from memory in the act of proposing from a public rostrum the banishment from Europe of all eligible bachelors. Maud had asked for the sketch, and he had given it her, neither of them noticing that the paper had writing on the back. When she came to look at it afterwards, she found it was a love song, though her entire absence of girlish vanity had prevented her from making any personal application of it, she saw new meaning in it now.

"Maud," said the doctor's little wife, jumping off the sofa, and sitting down by Maud, both of

whose hands she made capture of, in her own, "do you love him?"

Maud whispered "yes," a needless reply, for the light in her eyes, and the rosy flush on her face, had spoken the word already.

At last she said aloud—

"I don't understand the last few verses, Clara, why does he write in that hopeless fashion, as though there were nothing for either of us but renunciation?"

"Somebody forgets she is an heiress," was the reply.

"You don't mean to say that's the reason," said Maud, in utter surprise. "It says in the Sunday School books that money brings nothing but weariness and vexation of spirit, I used to laugh at it once, but I'm half inclined to believe it now."

After a little conversation between the two girls, Mrs. Corrie rose to go.

"One word more Clara," said Maud hastily,

" you are a little witch to have found out all this. Of course you will keep your knowledge a secret from everyone without any exception, or "—she added laughing, " I may treat you in orthodox witches' fashion, throw you into the Elva, to see if you will float."

The kind-hearted little woman looked discomfitted. " I'm not going to gossip about it," she said evasively.

" That won't do," said Maud firmly, " I must have a distinct promise from you that you will tell no one. That is my right—and I demand it."

" No one at all Maud? "

" No one whatever."

" It really is too bad," said Clara reproachfully, " if I were only as tall as you are, you shouldn't bully me into acquiescence. But I'm always afraid of you, when your eyes flash like that. I think I'll practise the accomplishment, with a view to husband taming. How is it done? "

"Do you promise?" repeated Maud, disregarding the last enquiry.

"Oh yes, I promise of course, since you make me, but its tragically disappointing."

"Whom did you want to tell?"

"Arthur Calverley of course," said Clara in rather a crest-fallen tone. "I had sketched a small tragedy in imagination. Arthur at the 'Elm Tree,' sharpening his razor with a view to suicidal operations, the gleaming blade is lifted high in air, he murmers the name of Maud Atherton, and then——!!! I rush in pale and beautiful."

"'Pale and beautiful,'" repeated Maud, doubtfully, "what a faithful description of yourself."

"Yes," returned Clara, laughing, "I insist upon the words 'pale and beautiful,' but you are spoiling the dramatic effect. I rush in, and in sublime words tell him the whole truth. He recovers—falls at my feet with gratitude, then rushes off to repeat the performance at yours.

You are both devotedly attached to me and to each other, and he only uses razors henceforth for shaving."

In the hurried conflict of feeling these new thoughts had awakened, Maud felt less in a humour for nonsense than usual, but she smiled as she replied—

"I am sorry to disappoint your histrionic ideas, but melo-drama, is not exactly like real life. 'All the world' isn't 'a stage' conducted on those principles, so I must beg—nay, I must command you to keep my secret."

Clara promised, and having kissed Maud affectionately, went home, rather disappointed that the luxury of match-making was forbidden her.

The words 'he loves me,' form a sweet refrain to a woman's life. As the sunshine poured through the open window on Maud's rich brown hair, the thought that sorrow was inevitable, appeared more distant from her than ever. The world had always seemed beautiful to her, and

now she was awakening to new sensations of happiness, sweeter than she had ever known before.

She felt so glad of life, so grateful for it that summer morning. She hardly thought of the future, this joy was too new and subtle a thing to analyse. She knew now that he loved her, and that was enough.

"I shall see him to-night," she thought as she remembered gladly that he and Sir Herbert Stansfeld had appointed to meet at the vicarage that evening for a game at chess.

Was it foolish to hold this love as so high and holy a gift? We of this age, so fond of styling itself enlightened, have almost come to think so—a large portion of our Victorian literature, either cants about love, or cynically denies its existence in real life altogether. But individual experience and history, which is the world's experience, seem to teach otherwise, for they prove that the men who have led the grandest lives, in the battle field

or at the royal court, in the Senate, in the author's chamber, in the artists' studio, in the city's streets, and the peasant's cottage, in all the different spheres life affords for activity and endurance, have been the men who believed in woman-worship as a vital power, and to whom chivalry was not a dead creed, finding fictitious existence in a poet's song, but an eternal truth, destined in spirit, though not in form, to outlive "the wreck of matter and the crash of worlds."

To Maud at all events love seemed beautiful and holy, as her young heart so newly initiated in its mysteries, repeated Arthur's words.

"For Love is Life—and Heaven—and God."

CHAPTER VIII.

"You cannot think that the buckling on of the knight's armour by his lady's hand, was a mere caprice of romantic fashion. It is the type of an eternal truth—that the soul's armour is never well set to the heart, unless a woman's hand has braced it, and it is only when she braces it loosely that the honour of manhood fails."

Ruskin.

ARTHUR had almost decided within his own mind to leave Elverley, and had really intended his last visit to the vicarage to be a farewell one, but in the course of the evening Ralph Atherton had said—

"You must have a game at chess with Sir

Herbert one day this week Arthur. You are too strong for me, but he has studied it more than I, and may perhaps be able to save the prestige of Elverley."

Sir Herbert had accompanied the customary denial of proficiency with a polite expression of the hope that Arthur would afford him an opportunity of putting it to the test.

Arthur had wavered, his intention had been to resist all temptations however seductive, but negatives are always difficult when the witchery of bright eyes, suggests a fascinating course, so glancing at Maud, his resolution failed him utterly, and he had accepted Sir Herbert's challenge, silencing conscience when it reminded him disagreeably of his broken resolutions by the reflection that like a provincial actor's appearance on the stage, it was 'positively for the last time.'

Very weak such sophistry on Arthur's part absolutedly was, but it is hard to be always at the highest pitch of heroism. If you consider

this yielding very inconsistant with a naturally strong disposition, then reader I must ask you if the finest character you ever knew, (which candidly you must admit to be yourself) never yielded against his better judgment, to the tyranny of a lovely face. But whether such conduct can plead precedent or not, one thing is certain, Arthur and Sir Herbert met one evening at the vicarage by appointment, their surface motives being a game at chess.

Sir Herbert also however had designs extending beyond the sixty-four squares of the chess board. He had decided to marry Maud, and thought this evening would afford a good opportunity to appoint a time when he could tell her of the glorious destiny which awaited her.

I have said that the possibility of a refusal had never crossed his mind. If any one had dared to suggest such a thing, he would have regarded that individual with thoughtful pity, as a heretic, and treated his views with contemptuous tolerance,

just as he would have received the statement that the Duke of Wellington was nephew to the prophet Ezekiel, or the assertion that the moon was a highly burnished frying-pan.

So he had never had any distrust or jealousy of Arthur, but had conceived a diluted liking for him, as a gentlemanly fellow, who talked well without being dogmatic, or satirical. Satire was Sir Herbert's pet aversion, as he rarely understood it, and found it in consequence, not easy to successfully encounter. So he greeted Arthur with slightly emphatic politeness, which was his nearest approach to cordiality, and after a little general conversation they sat down to the game.

"May I ask one great favour, Miss Atherton?" said Arthur.

"What is it?" asked Maud.

"That you will favour me—us I mean, with some of those 'songs without words,' of Mendelssohn's I heard you playing the other night."

"I am afraid I shall interrupt you," she replied, but Arthur declaring that he played much better when he was listening to music, and Sir Herbert remarking with rather less politeness than usual, that when his attention was absorbed in chess, he never noticed surroundings, Maud went quietly to the piano without further word.

Arthur won the draw for choice of men and first move, and playing out first his king's pawn, and then his king's bishop's pawn, the game became the Muzio gambit, that most brilliant of attacks being his favourite opening.

Sir Herbert's style of playing was characteristic; he played very cautiously, taking a long time to consider every move, and rejecting any tactics that involved uncertainty or danger.

Arthur on the other hand played very rapidly, and with considerable brilliancy, but not always a really sound game. His thoughts were far less with knights and pawns, than with the sweet notes from the piano, now low and dreamy, and

now inspiring and joyous, seeming in their power of changing from one form of beauty to another, a fitting emblem of Maud herself.

Surely if ever poetry found utterance in music, it is in the writings of Mendelssohn. Grander music there is, undoubtedly; but though these greater strains may be rich in more wondrous harmonies, attaining higher intellectual perfection, what music can echo the inarticulate yearnings of the heart like his? Now, some sweet remembrance finds utterance in a succession of minor chords, now, there is a crashing discord as of a spirit's agony, and then, the music flows like a happy rivulet, as though the heart, whose voice it is, had fought through doubt and sadness, to a course of truth and light beyond.

And Maud played, with so true because so loving an understanding of the composer's meaning, one after another of these musical poems found deeper meaning for Arthur from her exquisite rendering, and he became less absorbed in

the game, and Sir Herbert more so, every minute.

At last one of the airs seeming to accord specially with Maud's mood, she began to play a fantasia upon it. Arthur could see that she had entirely forgotten everything but the music, and was as unconscious of her surroundings as if she had been quite alone.

Presently she began to play a sweet air, he felt certain was her own composition, commencing sadly in the minor, but changing its key in the second movement, and becoming a strain as glad as the voice of a skylark. It sounded like a song, and he thought, if she would wed that wonderful music to words, how beautiful the poorest thoughts would seem—charmed into sweetness by her voice.

And his wish was granted in a most unexpected manner, for Maud began to sing his own words.

It was the song he had unconsciously given her, on the back of his sketch of Miss Gloffoggen, and she began it entirely forgetting he was present; she recollected herself at the fourth line

however, faltered, and almost broke down, but thinking it would be less likely to attract notice if she finished the song now she had begun it, she recovered her voice and sang it right through.

And Arthur forgot both Sir Herbert and chess utterly, as he listened to his own thoughts finding deeper meaning uttered by that sweet contralto voice.

"The night is bleak and chill,
The wild flowers shrink in the blast,
The mad winds moan like a spirit's cry,
The pitiless rain falls fast,
But my heart is strong to bear
Life's keenest pain to night,
As I dream of a face that is fair and young,
With eyes of tender light.

The lightest touch of her hand
Could hush my soul to calm,
The lightest word of her laughing speech
Was holy as a psalm,
The lightest tone of her voice
Could bind me with a spell,
Though soft as the leaves of a moss-wreathed rose,
Or the chime of a fairy bell.

Her eyes are far away,
Her soul can ne'er be mine,
And she knoweth not my spirit kneels,
In worship at her shrine,
I' the tangled forest of life,
Our paths lie wide apart,
But wherever her fairy footsteps fall,
She beareth away my heart."

"It is your move, Mr. Calverley," said Sir Herbert as the music ceased.

"I beg your pardon," said Arthur, "I—I had forgotten," and so saying, annoyed at having lost control over himself, he moved one of his pieces at random.

"What in the world are you thinking about Arthur?" exclaimed Ralph Atherton, "you have actually put your queen *en prise*."

Sir Herbert swept the piece in question off the board with alacrity.

"You resign the game I suppose," he said.

Arthur had risen to do so, but Maud who had

left the piano, and was standing beside the chess table, said to him in a low voice.

"Don't give the game up, I am sure you can win it if you choose."

"You have not seen the board," said Arthur in the same tone.

"I need not do so," she replied, "to be certain of the result. Will you win the game—for me?"

Arthur looked into the depths of her beautiful eyes, he thought he had never seen them or any other eyes look so bright, and answered, "yes."

"You resign the game, I suppose." repeated the Baronet complacently.

"No," said Arthur quietly, "I will fight it out to the death."

Ralph Atherton and Maud sat beside the chess table to watch the game; all felt that the real interest of the struggle had only just commenced.

It was Arthur's move, and he calculated the possibilities of every policy minutely, he was

determined if any effort could make it possible to win the game, that he would do so.

It was the first favour Maud had ever asked him, and small as the request was, he felt as though no sacrifice would be too great to enable him to fulfil it.

So he abandoned all schemes of brilliant unsound play, all tempting forlorn hopes, and threw every energy he posseseed into the game, as though life itself depended on the issue.

The four faces round the chess-board would have made a fine study for an artist at that moment. Ralph watched the game with calm interest as a fine specimen of critical play. Sir Herbert's face suggested a more complicated state of mind. There was the evidence of a keen desire to win the game, blended with a slight annoyance at the difficulty of doing so, (to which was added a look of astonishment at the metamorphosis in his opponent's style of play. Arthur's handsome face was slightly flushed, and

its usual careless expression had become one of passionate determination.

Maud was as excited as he, and watched the unequal struggle, as though she had been the prize for which they were contending.

How splendidly Arthur played that game. If the finest chess-player in the country had been opposed to him, he would have made a long and brilliant struggle of it, though of course the immense superiority of forces, must at length, have won the victory. But with such an opponent as Sir Herbert, his attack was simply irresistible. He made no glaring error, but his defence was frequently tame, and unequal to the occasion. At last Arthur looked quietly at Maud, and she saw in his eyes the confirmation of her own belief that the game was virtually over.

And so indeed it was. Sir Herbert's forte was defence, and he played that evening unusually well, but Arthur's attack was conducted with

such consummate skill, as to be almost resistless. At last Arthur said quietly.

"Checkmate is inevitable Sir Herbert in three moves."

"I always like to be actually checkmated before resigning," replied the young Baronet rather less amiably than usual.

So they played the three moves out, which afforded Sir Herbert the opportunity to recover his temper and say with his usual politeness.

"It is no dishonour to be beaten by such a player. I congratulate you on your proficiency—it is really remarkable."

"It is very remarkable," said Ralph Atherton. "I have always considered you a bold and brilliant player, Arthur, but I never saw you play as you have done to-night, I don't think a single move since the loss of your queen, could have possibly been improved on. What supernatural power inspired you?"

Perhaps Maud might have been able to throw

some light on the subject if she had chosen; it is certain her colour was unusually high, and she seemed rather nervous, a most unusual thing for her, which symptoms are not commonly connected with the critical observation of chess.

She soon recovered her self-possession and seeing Sir Herbert was rather discomfitted at his recent defeat, asked him to sing.

Now it was one of his pet delusions that he had a good baritone voice, therefore he replied almost eagerly for him.

"I will try, Miss Atherton, if you will play my accompaniment."

So Maud sat down resignedly to the piano, while Sir Herbert cleared his throat and tried to look unconscious.

It was a love song, the general tenor of which was that he slept nightly, (in company with an owl and a moon-beam) on his dead love's grave, and the second verse informed humanity at large that the lady in question had eyes like something

that wasn't audible, and a nose like something-else which no one could hear.

The effect of the ballad was materially heightened by the singer's occasional flatness, and a disregard of time, which from a philosophic point of view was enviable.

Maud secretly writhed at the infliction, but Sir Herbert at the conclusion of the song, turned to Arthur with a calm consciousness of having distinguished himself, and asked his late opponent if he were musical.

Arthur would probably have denied it, as he wanted to hear Maud sing again, but Ralph answering for him, he yielded to the general request, and took the seat at the piano which Maud had just vacated.

He struck a few fine chords, with a clear ringing touch, and was about to choose a lively ballad very much in vogue that summer, but suddenly changing his mind, he sang to a dreamy minor air the following words, his rich tenor voice, and

perfect enunciation forming a striking contrast to Sir Herbert's wandering and indistinct baritone.

"In life's enchanted spring time, when all was fair and young,
And the leafy boughs of forest trees, i' the happy sunlight swung,
High-hearted with the jewelled hopes the light-winged moments brought,
I built a lordly palace in the fair domain of thought.

No jarring note of cadence sad was heard within its walls,
But gaily rang the laugh and song thoughout the stately halls;
And the harshest sound that woke the dreamy echoes from their rest
Was the plash of falling water on the fountain's marble breast.

At the first cold breath of winter my fairy palace fell,
And a thousand happy fancies lay buried there as well,
But life spoke to my wounded heart, in sorrow's wintry blast,
And bade me build a temple from the ruins of the past.

I built it, not of fancies, but of passionate belief,
Of highest aspirations, and of wisdom taught by grief,
Of lowly faith and homage, furnace-tried like burnished gold,
And whate'er was best and noblest in the ruined dream of old.

While ever on the altar, where the placid moonbeams steal,
I sacrifice each worthless aim, false faith or low ideal,
And as its pure light burneth bright, the sacrificial flame
Reveals the sweet inscription—graven deep—*a woman's name.*

Only the name of a woman, and yet of one more fair,
Than the smile of the brightest star-beam that quivers in midnight air,
Only the name of a woman, and yet of one so sweet,
The trampled flower esteems it joy to die beneath her feet.

That is my heart's sweet secret. When life's long strain is o'er,
When love finds full fruition and is fraught with pain no more,
Our souls may meet together, and she then perchance may know,
Of the temple which I builded for her worship long ago.

After a little more music, Sir Herbert and Arthur went home. The former had so far gained his object, that he had persuaded Maud to promise to call on his sister Agnes next morning, nominally to see some embroidery, in reality he thought, to consent to be his wife.

"I'll get this business over at once," he said to himself, "I couldn't have believed it possible ever to get to like a girl so much. She's really very charming. I wonder if Calverley was thinking about her when he sung that bosh about temples and worship. However, even if he did mean her, she has too much common sense to think of comparing him with ME."

Arthur walked rapidly to the 'Elm Tree' to fight the old battle all over again.

But the question bore a new aspect now, the thought, "I must renounce all hope of winning her," had been hard enough, when he had fancied her quite indifferent to him, but now he could not silence a hope that it was otherwise,

and the old longings were more passionate than before, like the renewed progress of a dammed up stream.

He had never played chess in his life, as he had done that evening after she had asked him to win the game, for her. If he could win her for his wife, to what high ends might he not attain, with her beauty and her love to inspire him? No, he could not keep the secret any longer, he had half confessed it already—he must tell her all, and if this new hope proved false, and it seemed too beautiful for reality, he would still always love and believe in womanhood for her sake.

He unlocked his desk, and took out the manuscript of the comedy Walter Medhurst had so much disliked. He read a few scenes, but Alice Elphenden's heartless cynicism had ceased to represent womanly faith to his mind.

He smiled at two or three of the epigrams, and then tore the paper into shreds.

And with it he destroyed the vacillation, the

weakness, and the atheism in life, that had lately marred his fine character. Henceforth he had a distinct life-purpose, from which nothing could make him swerve. It was to strive with passionate earnestness, patient endurance, and unflinching steadfastness to become worthy of the girl he loved.

CHAPTER IX.

" Wilt thou reach stars, because they shine on thee?"

Shakespeare.
(Two Gentlemen of Verona.)

MAUD felt it rather a bore to have to go to Elverley Hall next morning. She was not so passionately fond of embroidery, as to care to sacrifice much for its sake, and Agnes Stansfeld could only talk about one subject.

" She will probably produce a lock of red hair, and expect me to go into hysterics with admiration of it," said Maud to her father, as she started.

However, she went, and was rather surprised to find Sir Herbert at home. Agnes Stansfeld always greeted her cordially but this morning there was an unusual affection in her manners, which was rather perplexing.

However, they examined the embroidery together, and talked in technical terms about fancy work, but as that language is decidedly more obscure than Chinese, and I have not the faintest conception what it means, I will not bring shame and derision on my head by attempting to repeat it.

Then Sir Herbert chiming in, the conversation became general—and insipid. It is astonishing how long people can talk without expressing anything that bears the faintest resemblance to an actual thought. Maud became almost monosyllabic in her replies, as brother and sister talked of the weather, of croquet parties, of the neighbouring families, and the last Entwich ball. At last, however, Miss Stansfeld said there was a new

Parisian style of bonnet she must show Maud, and in supposed quest of it she left the room.

Even now Maud had no suspicion of Sir Herbert's intention, but was just wondering what his next remark would be, when he said—

"Miss Atherton, I have been thinking lately of being married."

In his mental rehearsals of the scene he had decided that at this stage of proceedings, Maud would either blush or turn pale, and evince some lady-like sign of agitation, so he was a little disconcerted when she replied without the faintest loss of self possession—

"Indeed! I am glad to hear it, is the lady's name a secret?"

"I have not asked her yet," he said, feeling rather nervous, and with very much less than his usual self-confidence.

Maud's low, musical laugh, was not encouraging, she saw now the goal for which he was aiming, and felt very little sentimental pity for his impending disappointment.

"Isn't it barely possible," she said, with a rather wicked light in her large eyes, "in the extraordinary caprice of her sex, that the lady may decline the honour you think of bestowing?"

"I hope not," he said, "I think not—Miss Atherton, you will make me very happy if you tell me positively that she will not."

"I?"

"Yes," he answered quickly, "I can give you a position in the county worthy of your beauty, and as my wife you will shine brightest of all in the most brilliant circles of London." This was a speech carefully prepared before-hand, and delivered more fluently than his preceding remarks.

The laughter had gone from Maud's eyes, as she said quietly—

"Sir Herbert, you have made a great mistake; there is nothing in life more impossible than that I should ever be your wife."

"Not possible," echoed Sir Herbert, utterly bewildered.

"Certainly not," Maud replied, with most uncompromising emphasis. "Let us talk of other things."

But the Baronet would not submit to defeat so easily.

"What is your objection?" he said.

"Why will you compel me to be uncomplimentary?" returned Maud. "I have no doubt many girls would consider you had conferred a great honour upon them, if you had spoken to them as you have done to me, but for my own part, I should decidedly prefer to love the man whom I promise to marry."

"Don't you think you might grow to love me in time?" enquired Sir Herbert, very much crestfallen.

"No," replied Maud, with something of her old mischief sparkling in her face, "my feelings are too erratic to be trained like a grapevine."

"I cannot understand such a motive," he

answered, becoming really angry. "You have no positive dislike for me?"

"No," said Maud, frankly, "I don't believe anyone has—you are far too agreeable and good natured."

"Then why do you speak of it being hopeless?" he asked. "Do you like anyone better?"

"I like a good many people better," she answered, not wishing to give the conversation too grave a tone.

"You know what I mean," he retorted, "do you love anyone? Arthur Calverley for instance."

Maud's face flushed as though the rosy light of sunset were shining upon it.

For the first time during the interview she rose from her chair, and said with quiet dignity—

"You have no right to ask me a question of that nature. I must beg—I must command you not to repeat it."

Sir Herbert bowed and was silent. His self-conceit had made him behave like a fool, but he

was not usually one, so refrained from making matters worse. Moreover, he was rather afraid of Maud now that he had seen her angry, so he submitted to being put down for once.

Maud was the first to break the silence, she held out her hand and said in her old frank engaging manner—

"Don't let us leave the subject like this. Let us part friends—there really is nothing for either of us to be tragical about. You have spoken foolishly, and I angrily, so we are quiet, let us leave the matter so."

Sir Herbert took the little hand she held out to him, and put it to his lips.

"I do not take the matter so lightly," he said.

"You will by to-morrow," she replied. "If your vanity is wounded, so ought mine to be. I have told you in reply to a direct question, that I am not in love with you, but then it is equally true that you are not in love with me."

"Have I not just asked you to be my wife?" he interrupted her by saying.

"Yes," returned Maud, "you have, and I suppose you asked your wine merchant to send you in so many dozen of port when your cellars were empty. You don't want a wife, you want a housekeeper, and there are many girls who will grace this beautiful mansion far better than I."

Then with one of her quick transitions of feeling, she added—

"I have spoken too plainly, perhaps, but you know I am half an Italian, and you must forgive my impulsiveness. I suppose you like me a little, or you would not have offered me the title of wife. If you will offer me another one, that of friend, I will accept it and will forget, or try to forget, that you have said anything else this morning."

She looked so beautiful as she spoke, and there was something so fascinating in her relenting mood after her words of pretty scorn, that a

feeling nearer love than anything he had known in his life before was called into life by her words, like a responsive echo. After all he was a gentleman, and it was with all the dignity of one he replied—

"It is I who must ask forgiveness. I have been presumptuous and foolish, I see it now; but if this interview is closed by the promise of your friendship, I cannot regret that it has been."

He put her hand once more to his lips respectfully. The man's heart was right enough, and if he had been born a poor man, for whom society did not care what is conventionally termed "tuppence," (in which sum there would seem to be some inherent cause for contempt,) he might have gone through life very decently indeed. But nature is a strange stage-manager, she often makes her heroes mere scene-shifters, or gives them a very lowly part in the drama of life, while she dresses her clowns in silk and feathers and bids them strut before the footlights as the

incarnation of the highest possibilities of man hood.

Radicalism has proclaimed, rather hoarsely as is its wont, that this is always so, a creed which involves, prior to its acceptance, the entire obliteration both of history and common sense, but that it is sometimes so, titled orthodoxy can only disprove by hiding its head, ostrich-fashion, in polemical sand.

If Sir Herbert had been a draper's assistant, he would have measured out tape and ribbon in most desirable manner, as a baronet and a man of fortune he did not succeed so well.

But Maud had touched the truth and honour that lay beneath his conceit and self-complacency; the heart must be hollow and false indeed that gives no response to the touch of a true woman's hand.

He would have spoken further, but at that moment, his sister entered the room with the Parisian bonnet, it had taken so long to find.

She seemed rather disappointed at not finding Maud in her brother's arms, but when after admiring the bonnet, which I am afraid she bestowed no more attention upon than if it had been a coal-scuttle, Maud rose to go, Miss Agnes became almost speechless with indignation and astonishment.

When their visitor however had left the house, the spell was broken.

"Herbert," she exclaimed, "have you spoken to her?"

"Yes," he replied, "I have."

"And do you mean to tell me that she has refused you?"

"I mean to tell you nothing."

"Then I know that she has done so, and I say of all the ungrateful worthless girls——"

But Sir Herbert interrupted her.

"Agnes," he said, "I will speak plainly to you, I have asked her to be my wife, and she has refused, I hold her in the highest respect and

honour, and will never hear her spoken of in any other tone. Beyond that I have nothing to say, except to bid farewell to the subject for ever."

And so ended—abruptly enough—Sir Herbert Stansfeld's wooing.

CHAPTER X.

"Whom the Gods love die young."

SO said the Greeks of old, touching thereby the saddest note perhaps in the whole minor music of life.

We mourn when the hero falls lifeless on the battle-field, when the artist's pencil drops from his dying hand, when the poet's song is hushed for ever, but it is incomparably sadder to think of the untried hero who died before his life could be wreathed with laurels, of the young artist who only lived to shadow forth the genius that must one day be, of the poet whose song was silent

before the world had time to know and love its meaning.

In the cottage, where Arthur had seen him first, Maud's little favourite, Alfred Thorby, lay dying. His blue eyes were bright as ever, his long golden hair fell upon the cushion where his head rested, in rich luxuriance, but the pulsations of life were faint and tremulous, and the throbbing of the brave young heart would soon have ceased for evermore.

His strength had been failing rapidly, and for a week he had not left his bed, but to-day he was better, he said, and would get up.

So he lay on the couch (it was Ralph Atherton's gift) watching the setting sun, and wondering if he should ever see it rise again.

The villagers had been in to see him with kindly words, and rough but heartfelt sympathy; he would be better soon, they told him, but he would shake his head with a strange sweet smile, and a light in his blue eyes, like a river's reflection of the stars.

Ralph Atherton had been there often too, with earnest words, and helpful deeds of comfort, and Arthur had been much beside the child's bed, so strong and yet so gentle, that poor Mrs. Thorby (who had left off whining over fancied grief in the presence of the reality of sorrow) loved his very footstep, and would, if he had asked it, have laid her head beneath his feet.

But the visitor, whose touch was gentlest, whose voice was softest, whose heart yearned most tenderly over the young spirit fast fluttering into the mysterious silence of Death, was Maud.

And when the child was weakest, when he was most prostrated by weariness, a new light would flash in his eyes at the sound of her footstep and a flush, faint and transient, would for a moment tinge the pallor of his cheek.

She was always bright even now, sometimes reading to him, sometimes talking about the fancies he loved so tenderly, sometimes singing to him in a voice so low and sweet that he used

to fancy it was spirit music, and that no one could hear and love it but he. She was always cheerful, sometimes almost gay, but once as she bent over him to smooth his pillow, with her light womanly touch, a tear had fallen on his face, and he had known with passionate gladness that it had been shed for him.

"Miss Maud," he said to her this last day, as she stood beside the couch where he lay, "do you know that I am dying?"

Maud tried to speak and could not.

"I wonder" he said, dreamily, "if the angels will have eyes like yours. May I tell you something? You will not be angry if I do?"

"I angry, Alfred—with you?"

"I knew you would not be," he said, "but I do not know how to say what I mean. I am only a child—but I think a man—could not love you more than I—you have made me so strong—to bear pain—and you are so beautiful—that even now while I am so weak—there is some hidden

strength within me—at the thought of you I cannot understand it—but it is there—"

It was with difficulty he said all this, for his breathing was laboured and painful, and his words were frequently interrupted by coughing, but his passionate desire to speak those long hidden thoughts conquered everything.

He went on, presently, to say faintly—

"If I were not dying—I would never have told this. If I had been strong—I would have worked my whole life long, for your sake, and no one should ever have known it,—but now I want you to understand—that your voice is as sweet to me—as the harps of heaven—that your touch on my forehead—falls like balm—that when I watch your face—I know as if I had seen Him—that there is a God."

Maud's self-control failed utterly, she knew the child's nature so well—the poet's heart, prematurely wise in thought and passion, the young life taught unchild-like lessons by pain, the

genius that had produced fair buds and rich blossoms, but would never live to bring forth fruit; that she understood what many would think unnatural, and felt honoured by this childish worship, though a week before she had treated a rich man's wooing with disdain.

And the little life ebbing away so fast was so dear to her, she had come to regard this golden-haired child so tenderly, that the constraint she had exerted over herself so long broke down utterly, and laying her head on the pillow beside him, she sobbed as she had never in her life time done before.

He had never seen her weep and putting his hand—how small and thin, and white it was—upon her rich brown hair, he said tenderly—

"I am not worthy of those tears, dear Miss Maud, you must not be so sorry about me."

Maud put her arms round the child, and pressed her sweet red lips to his, but her heart was too full for one word of utterance. She made him

put his head upon her bosom, and resting thus the child, tired out with his exertions, fell asleep.

It was in this position that Arthur found him when he entered the cottage; he signed to Maud not to move, and having whispered a word of comfort to the child's mother, sat quietly down to wait the end.

It was not far off. Dr. Corrie came in for a few minutes, but could do nothing. "Don't wake the child," he said, "it is better he should rest quietly."

Arthur took the doctor aside.

"I do not ask if there is any hope," he said, "I see there is none, but how long?"

"The end is very near," was the grave reply, "two or three hours at latest."

"Then I will stay till all is over," he said, "and see if I can be of any use."

So the doctor left the cottage, and the light slowly faded away from without, like the little life within.

After about an hour's silence the child woke, but for the first time during his illness he was delirious, and talked incoherently of many things. Very strange the wanderings of his mind seemed to the listeners round him. Sometimes he would repeat stanzas from poems he had composed—weak as boyish poetry always is, but with frequent flashes of true thought and real beauty that held out high promise never to be fulfilled.

Frequently the idea that Maud was in danger of some kind, took possession of his mind, and he suffered intensely at the thought of his powerlessness to help her. She was in a desert, he fancied, dying of thirst, and he must cross the mountains to rescue her,—"I shall be too late," he cried, "these mountains are so steep, their sharp stones cut my feet."

They quieted him, and Maud whispered that she was near him, and would not go away, but still the shapeless idea of danger haunted him and he moaned piteously.

"She is being swept away by the river's tide, and I cannot save her."

How long this lasted they never knew, probably less than an hour, for it was rather the natural incoherence of a wearied brain, than actual delirium. Tired out by the exertion of talking, he soon fell asleep again, and after the lapse of about twenty minutes woke perfectly calm and conscious.

His cough had ceased, but so also had his power of utterance, he lay quite peacefully in Maud's arms now.

Presently he folded his hands together, and looked entreatingly at Arthur.

"He wishes you to pray," Maud whispered.

Arthur hesitated a moment, then knelt down and repeated the Lord's prayer, in tones very unlike his usual clear strong voice. At its conclusion the child gave him a faint smile of thanks, then put up his lips to Maud to be kissed.

She bent lovingly over him, and pressed her

lips once more to his, when she raised her head again all was over, and the childish spirit was at rest.

At rest with the Spirit of whom poetry is the uncertain shadow, in the land where we shall learn some day what life really means, when its maddening cries of pain will prove the confused prelude to harmonies eternal and divine.

CHAPTER XI.

Mining and banking shares he cherished dearly,
His airy castles all were built of gold,
And when he "babbled o' green fields," 'twas merely,
As good security he chanced to hold.

"NOW that the servants have left the room and we are quite alone I should like to have a little private conversation with you, Lady Glendale."

This ominous remark fell from the lips of Lady Glendale's husband, and was uttered in a tone which made the words extremely offensive. It is written in the law of society which altereth not, that if a man wishes to insult a young and beautiful woman, he should first place a wedding-ring upon her finger.

Sir Thomas Glendale was a man of about five-and-fifty years old, with shrewd keen eyes, and a voracious looking mouth. His figure was portly, his voice loud, he was well dressed, and simply, the only vulgarity in his attire being that his large hands which were coarse and red, were sparkling unduly with rings.

Thirty-five years before, he had been serving behind the counter at a small grocer's shop in London, thinking himself well paid, when he earned ten shillings a week. How he managed to scrape together a little hoard nobody knew, but the reason was not hard to find. If a customer wanted a horse held, or a parcel carried, he would volunteer his aid, and the sixpences and shillings slowly accumulated. What did he care, if his coat were out at elbows? he could wait his time.

He did not wait in vain, one day, when business had been unusually bad, his master said to him: "Thomas, my boy, it's all up, if I'd got a little

more money, I could wait till things is better, but I haven't ten shillings left in the house."

"How much money would set you up?" said Thomas with an affectation of indifference.

"Oh very little indeed—I dare say fifteen pounds would be enough."

Thomas left the room and brought down his hoarded money—seventeen pounds in all, which he poured into the astonished grocer's hands.

"There," he said triumphantly, "I'll lend it you on your note of hand, only I'll be hanged if I take less than twenty per cent interest."

Things had turned out just as he had expected; when the bills became due the grocer could not pay his servant, so took him into partnership instead. Fortune favoured them now, as it had never done before. By dint of rigid economy young Glendale contrived to scrape up (no other word can convey the actual facts) a few hundred pounds—and having sold his share in the old partnership for fifty, set up in business for himself.

But not in the old lowly style, he had grown tired of that, so he spent every farthing he possessed, and incurred heavy debts beside, to make a great show of wealth. It was the mere trick of a gambler, he knew that well enough, but he preferred brilliant possibilities to slow certainties. The cards all turned up in his favour, and he soon learnt, for the first time, the intoxication of success.

For ten years he worked from seven in the morning till late at night; then he sold his business and retired with fifty thousand pounds in hard cash.

It was not a very large sum to speculate with, but it was sufficient for his purpose, and he began to buy up mining, banking, and railway shares as though loss were impossible.

He speculated in the most hazardous style, buying up shares which sold for little more than their weight in waste paper. Here, again, fortune favoured him, many of his undertakings

failed, but others succeeded so brilliantly that in a few years he was known upon 'Change as a rich man.

Even this was not enough for him, he went on adding to his colossal fortune till his name became a by-word and the most extravagant rumours were afloat concerning him. He could write a cheque for a million of money at any time, having always at least that sum lying idle at his bankers; he could equip a fleet at his own expense, and had cellars beneath his great house where bank notes lay upon the ground like straw. The men who were best able to judge of his resources laughed at all this, but they whispered among themselves that Glendale could always, at less than a month's notice, raise nine hundred thousand pounds.

At last, however, he threw up his cards and retired from the commercial gaming table. One or two defeats, (trivial to him, but not inherently so,) warned him that his luck might turn. He took the hint and left off speculating.

About this time he had been offered the honour of knighthood; he had accepted it, and with it a seat in parliament. As he never spoke in the House, (or out of it either on politics,) he was universally regarded as a great man.

He had never married, but now that he had no longer commercial gambling to occupy his mind, he began to look out for a wife.

Like all his purchases it was a brilliant success from a superficial point of view. He met Kate Rushton one evening, and asked her in less than a week to be his wife. She was young—he was not particularly so: she was wonderfully beautiful —he was rather plain: she was the lineal descendant of a countess—he could trace his ancestry no farther than his grandmother who was a charwoman, she was *poor*, and he was immensely rich. Could any pair be better suited to each other.

Sir Thomas thought not: apparently Kate Rushton was of the same opinion, for she consented to become his wife.

And now, after they had been married over a year, Sir Thomas made the remark with which this chapter opens.

"I wish to have some private conversation with you, Lady Glendale," he repeated.

"What is it?" she asked, wearily.

"I am going to give a dinner party," he said, in the quick sharp voice, with which he always spoke, "to some political friends, and I have to request you will receive them properly."

"I do not understand you," she replied, rather scornfully.

"I mean this, my lady, that I'm not satisfied with the way things are going on, that I'm not satisfied, for instance, with you."

She made no reply, but sat listening as though his words were concerning anything but herself.

He went on, after a pause, evidently much exasperated by her silence.

"I am not pleased by your behaviour in society —I won't allow you to flirt as you've been doing

lately, and I will have my friends treated with respect."

She answered now—her light-treble voice in marked contrast to his blustering tones.

"When I married you, did you think I cared for anything but your money—did you fancy that I loved you?"

He laughed boisterously and coarsely.

"Not being a fool," he said, "I never gave it a thought, but whether you care for me or not you shall obey me, or I'll know the reason why."

She rose, without a word, to leave the room.

"Stay," he said, angrily, "you shall hear me, there is a devil in me you will do well to leave alone."

"Do you think," she said, with flashing eyes, "that there are no devils in *my* breast?"

He answered with an oath, "There may be, but if you cross my will, I tell you I will spoil the beauty of which you are so abominably proud."

For the first time during the interview she

trembled. Brutality has an awfulness little less than infernal to a refined and sensitive woman.

He saw the advantage, and was not the man to lose it.

"Sit down," he said, imperatively.

She did so, trembling, and with both her hands upon her bosom, as if to still the too rapid breaking of her heart.

"Now," he said, "I have not much to say, I've not spoken like this before because I hate scenes—I will be obeyed. If I'm not a match for you in sarcasm, I'm more than a match for you in strength, and I'd——"

"What would you do," she asked, in a tone struggling between fear and passion.

He laid his hand roughly on her shoulder.

"Sooner than have it said that my wife defies me, and your bearing lately has been such as to make men think so, I would kill you."

He saw with triumph, that she was very pale, even to the lips. 'I have conquered her' he

thought to himself, and so without another word he left the room.

For some minutes after he was gone, Lady Glendale sat perfectly motionless. Poets had celebrated this woman's beauty in their sweetest songs, her dreamy violet eyes had inspired many an artist's dream, true men had offered her the wealth of pure-hearted homage, but she had turned from them all for the sake of a man, coarse, brutal, selfish, and *rich.*

She had had her wish, (meanness was not one of Sir Thomas's vices) and everything that money could buy, or the most extravagant taste demand, was always at her disposal.

The song of the bird in the gilded cage is extremely trite, and much that poets have said about the glories of poverty, and the misery of wealth, will not bear the test of common sense, but so long as the hearts of men and women yearn for sympathy, (and the dullest among us, is not quite free from such longings,) so long will mere

material comfort be a sorry substitute for the pure love of a true heart.

Lady Glendale had found it so, with that weariness the heart feels, when it faints beneath the knowledge that its sorrow can only find alleviation in the grave.

She had sought the only relief within her power—that of mingling in society. Wherever she went she knew she was by far the most beautiful, and there was a sense of triumph in that. She had flirted desperately, what were hearts to her? She was miserable, and nobody cared for that, why should she have more consideration for others?

"Who is Glendale?" She overheard a young man ask another at a crowded evening party, and the reply had been—

"Don't you know? Glendale used to be a Whitechapel grocer, or something of that kind, now he's a baronet, and a millionaire. He married old Rushton's daughter, the loveliest girl in London—there she is over there. Did you ever

see such a brilliant complexion, or such eyes and hair? But there her beauty ends, I believe there's less tenderness in her breast, then there is in the diamonds upon it," and the speaker had glanced lovingly at his wife, an amiable little woman, with woolly hair, and a nose, which I must spoil the beauty of a period, by calling a " snub."

But as as it very often happen in these cases society was wrong—if those who declared her absolutely without heart could have seen now, as she sat in the room, where she and her husband had lately been talking, they might have modified their opinion.

Fastened round her neck by a slight golden chain was a diamond ring, which lay upon her bosom night and day, she drew it forth and kissed it passionately, then she threw herself upon the ground and wept with all the agony of utter despair.

It was not the first time she had winced at her husband's coarseness and brutality, they had

made life a burden to her ever since they had been married, but to-night she had realised fully for the first time, the depth of misery and degradation that lay before her.

"And it is for this," she moaned, "that I parted with Arthur Calverley."

For she had always loved him—she knew it now. When it devolved upon her to choose between hardships and obscurity with him on the one hand, and wealth and rank without him on the other, it was not till after a long struggle that the more selfish and frivolous element in her nature had gained the victory, and she had made a false and unworthy choice.

And now when she thought of the chivalrous love that might have been her own, of the heart she had thrown away in a moment of madness, and of a voice whose lightest word was gentle in its tone to her, the great room with its costly furniture and lavish expenditure of wealth, faded from her eyes, and she saw through her tears as

in an enchanted mirror, herself a loved and honoured wife, strong to achieve and to endure for the sake of him she loved, and a baby on her breast, whose light touch could hush the unquiet throbbings of her heart.

For a moment a sad smile played upon her lips, like moonlight on rosy flowers, but the vision was a lying one, and the dull realities of life rose before her as cold and dreary as the grave.

She had brought this on herself by her own mad folly, but He who pardoned the sinful woman whom men would have slain, forbade us to pity only those whose hands and hearts are pure. It may be when the heavenly sunlight has swept away all mystery and doubt, we shall learn that these suffering erring souls were worthier of love and compassion, than those who by keeping afar from the passions of common humanity, bore no stain upon the whiteness of their raiment.

CHAPTER XII.

"He has outsoared the shadow of our night."

Shelley.

(Adonais.)

Arthur did not see Maud for some days after Alfred Thorby's death. When they met again, it was beside the little river Elva, where they had walked together—how long ago, it seemed now!

"You are looking sad this morning," he said gently after the first words of greeting.

"Am I?" she replied. "I was listening to the river, and its glad music seems changed to a long, low wailing to-day. Listen."

They walked on in silence for a few moments, and then Arthur said with a smile—

"I must know the course of your thought before I can listen with your ears—Miss Atherton."

"I was thinking," she said "of Alfred, and all his weird fancies and dreams. I can never tell you how dear that golden-haired child was to me."

Arthur said nothing, but wondered if she knew the secret which inspired the poetic fancies of that pure young heart.

"And I was thinking about my father," she resumed, "he has not been well lately, and has complained of acute pain at the heart. Somehow all these thoughts seemed echoed by the river, and with them, the presentiment of coming evil, but I am growing sentimental like Miss Clare."

"That is not fair to yourself," he said. "After so many years companionship it would be strange indeed if no friendship had grown up between

you and this fairy-like stream. I am half inclined to be superstitious about it myself."

"I notice you rarely avail yourself of a confession of weakness, Mr. Calverley," said Maud, "but your generosity is not quite unmerited this time. When I came here first I was only four years old, but my nurse used to bring me down to the river to throw pebbles into the water; then as I grew older I used to study here. And every poem or novel I have ever read is associated with the Elva, in the same way. One hot summer I had a fever and the stream ran nearly dry, and I had a childish fancy that there was some subtle sympathy between us; that it was glad or sorry when I was so; that its course was full and free when I was well and strong, and if ever its waters were dried up I should die. Of course I don't believe in the old childish superstition still, but I could not help fancying just now that it threatened a coming sorrow. I suppose such fancies are the result of an uneventful life."

"I should not call your life uneventful," he replied—"I think most men have a very narrow conception of what events really are. After all there is nothing in the universe wonderful but thought. The notion that the actual events of existence make up life is a vulgar one, the mere act of shooting a man is precisely identical with the act of shooting a rabbit, it is only the thought of the actor that makes the deed criminal or just."

"Then I suppose you consider the tragedy of life to lie in its secret struggles, of which the world knows nothing," said Maud thoughtfully. "Yes, I think you are right. But what of nature —are not the seas and the mountains wonderful?"

"Yes," he replied, reverently, "they are very wonderful, but are they not the embodied thoughts of God?"

"In themselves they are not wonderful, but spiritless and dull. I am artist enough to love Nature passionately, but I hold that a storm-lashed ocean, with its unfathomed depths of darkness

and mystery below, and the mad lightening quivering above are less wonderful, less mysterious and less tragical, than the thoughts enfolded in a woman's heart."

They had entered a little wood, lying outside the village, where the air stirred the boughs of the trees like whispered music; Maud caught the dreamy idea of it all, and sat down upon the trunk of an old tree to rest. They were silent for a few minutes, then Arthur said—

"I hold not only that a woman's heart is wonderful, but also that its power is mighty. I believe that a man, inspired by a true woman's love, her kiss having laid the seal of knighthood on his lips, has a strength which can defy the united powers of earth and hell."

He paused, and Maud said, wistfully—

"It would be a high ambition for a woman to inspire the life of a brave man, to awaken high capabilities in him of which he himself was before unconscious, and lead him upward to high

ends and noble achievement: it was an old dream of mine once, but my soul is not beautiful enough for such sweet love as that."

"Maud," he replied quickly, calling her by her Christian name for the first time, "such love is yours now, and will always remain so. I have tried to keep my secret, but I cannot. I love you not passionately merely, but with a depth and truth that are greater than my own heart. Since the moment when I first saw your face, before that, even when I had only heard your voice, I have felt that you held my life in your hands, and could mould it at your will."

Maud listened with a strange sweet gladness to his words; she loved him with all the wealth of a woman's heart; she perceived as only true natures can, all that was noble in him, and finding it worthy of worship gave her homage freely.

"One word more," he said, "my love would seem to many, it may seem to you—a madness, you are more highly endowed than any woman

on God's earth, while I have nothing and am nothing. But to love you was the first necessity of my nature. I have always worshipped beauty, and in you every dream of my life finds a full and perfect meaning, and I want you to believe, that I shall carry the remembrance of your lightest word with me wherever I go."

Her eyes were fixed upon the ground, and the little white hand resting upon the old tree trembled, but still she did not speak.

"Forgive me," Arthur said, "if I have pained you, I shall leave Elverley to-morrow, and we may never meet again; will you not tell me you do not despise my love?"

She raised her beautiful eyes to his face, and he read his answer in them.

"Arthur," she said, in the low sweet voice he loved so well, "I am not worthy of love like yours, but I cannot hide my secret either, you are incomparably dearer to me than the whole wide world beside."

And, with a long troth kiss, they vowed to love each other tenderly for evermore.

"Neither Maud nor Arthur ever forgot that hour in the wood where the air, laden with the breath of wild flowers, rustled among the leafy boughs, while the little river flowed in the distance.

Perhaps they sat two hours talking there, each had so much to tell the other. Arthur told her everything about Kate Rushton, and all the poverty of action that had marred his life of late. And Maud was so quick to understand every feeling of which he spoke, so gentle in her judgment of the past on which he felt so sorrowful and angry, so encouraging as she spoke about the future, that Arthur felt at once armed for the struggle with the world, and let sorrow come as it might, he knew that he could bear it now, and since she loved him, could feel under any suffering grateful that he lived.

"I shall leave Elverley in a day or two," he

said, "I have a home to build for you now darling, and must begin at once."

"It is hard to part so soon," said Maud, "but you are right Arthur. Have you spoken to papa about this?"

"No," he replied, "I had but faint hope of your answer, but I do not think he will be sorry about it. Do you?"

"No," said Maud, "you are a great favourite of his, I am sure he will be glad. Let us go and tell him."

She rose to go, with all her old gaiety returned.

"Does the river sound threatening now, my queen?" he whispered.

"No," she answered gaily, "you are a magician, I think, its song is all of high hope now."

So they walked together to the vicarage. Standing at the gate was little Mrs. Corrie, the doctor's wife, and Arthur saw from one glance at her face that something was wrong.

As they reached the house, Maud dropped some

flowers she was carrying, and instead of picking them up for her, he signed to Mrs. Corrie, while Maud's head was bent over them. "What is it?"

She said nothing aloud, but formed three words with her lips, her white face giving them an awful clearness.

Arthur staggered backwards, as though he had been struck by a strong hand in a steel gauntlet.

The whole scene transpired in a moment. Maud, who was gaily humming a song, finished picking up the flowers, and was coming forward to greet Clara, when she saw Arthur's face.

"What is wrong?" she cried, "you are hiding something from me — your face is white as death."

Arthur recovered himself with a strong effort.

"Dearest Maud," he said, "there is something I must tell you, and you must be brave to hear. Come into the house and you shall hear all."

They went into the first room they came to, Arthur made her sit down on the sofa, and took

her hand in his. She made an impatient sign to him to speak quickly, but she uttered no word.

"Darling," he said, tenderly, "you have a true woman's heart, and you will not flinch at sorrow I know; your father—— "

"Is he ill?" she asked, faintly.

"He is very ill—it is gravely feared that his life is in danger."

Even in the midst of all this sorrow and anxiety, Arthur could not help feeling a proud joy in her beauty. Her face was very pale, and her eyes shone with unnatural lustre, as she said, in a hollow voice, unlike her own—

"I know all—your faces tell it me—he is dead. Take me to him."

Arthur almost carried her upstairs into the silent room, so hushed and still, and there upon the bed, as though in dreamless sleep, lay the form of her dead father.

She realised the truth now, and flung herself upon the bed in utter abandonment of grief.

" He cannot be dead," she cried wildly, " this morning he kissed me, and spoke so lovingly and now——"

Vain is it Maud to clasp those dear hands to thy breast, they are cold, and give no responsive thrill, to gladden the heart that beats so passionately against them, vain is it to press thy red lips to those white lips of his, or whisper sweet words of tenderness in the ears that shall hear no more such music till the dawning of eternal day. All is over, and even love like thine is powerless here.

Arthur let her grief flow uninterrupted for a while, then he took her gently in his arms, and said—

" You must be brave my darling, as *he* would have wished, if not for your own sake, for mine, you will come down stairs now with me. Will you not?"

His strength and gentleness comforted her even in the midst of her grief.

" Yes," she answered faintly, " you are strong and good, I will do whatever you tell me."

But the effort was too great; and exhausted by the conflict of feeling she fainted away and would have fallen if he had not caught her in his arms. When he had poured water on her face, and revived her, her grief was quieter, and she let him carry her to her own room.

Clara Corrie sat by her side there, and Arthur went down stairs with a heavy heart. After an hour, that seemed interminable, Mrs. Corrie came into the room, her eyes swollen with crying, and told him how it all happened.

Ralph Atherton had suffered for a long time past from his heart, though it was only within the last few weeks that Dr. Corrie, his regular medical attendant, had discovered how seriously it was affected. But this morning he had gone out to call on a poor parishioner, and returned slightly fatigued. Ten minutes afterwards he told the old servant he was not feeling well, and

would try if he could sleep for an hour or two.

"Don't send for the doctor," he had said when she had suggested doing so, "I shall be better presently—and be sure you don't frighten Miss Maud when she comes in."

Sarah had sent for Dr. Corrie notwithstanding, but before he arrived at the Vicarage, Ralph was dead.

"Maud is asleep," concluded Clara Corrie. "After you had gone she sobbed herself to sleep, like a broken-hearted child. Did you tell her this morning that you loved her?"

"Yes."

"I am glad of that," said the little woman, as hopefully as possible, "she needs a strong man's love to support her under all this sorrow; I think the poor child would have died without you to-day."

"You, too," said Arthur, "have been a kind friend—you will stay in the house for a day or two, and take care of Maud, will you not?"

"Gladly," she said, "you may trust her with me without fear."

Arthur went softly upstairs to look once more on the cold impassive face.

It lay there cold and still, but with a smile on the pale lips, as though he had seen his fair young Italian bride once more, and was at rest with her for ever.

Arthur raised the lifeless hand to his lips, and breathed a prayer for the orphaned girl he loved so tenderly, then reverently covering his face, left him with sorrow, determination, and love in his own heart.

CHAPTER XIII.

"God's ichor fills the hearts that bleed,
The best fruit loads the broken bough,
And in the wounds our sufferings plough,
Immortal love sows sovereign seed."

Gerald Massey.
(Babe Christabel.)

ARTHUR took all responsibility of directing affairs off Maud's hands. There was not much to be done. Ralph Atherton left no fortune behind him to be the cause of greedy litigation, or hungry disappointment, and no relative of his was living except his brother. Arthur wrote to him, asking if he could come to Elverley and be present at the funeral, and Sir Harold had replied

to the effect that he would make a point of coming, although a most important race was to take place on that day, in which two of his finest horses were to take part. The orthography of this letter was peculiar, but seeing that the Baronet had in his passionate agony, attained to such a pitch of self-denial as the renunciation of a horse-race, it is only charitable to ascribe this to the distracting influence of grief.

However, he came, and was sincerely affected when he saw the look of grief in Maud's fair young face. Ralph and he had never had any sympathies in common, and they had gone their different ways by tacit consent on each side. Ralph had made a faint effort at correspondence, but quite in vain. Sir Harold hated letter-writing, and half-a-dozen written sentences could only by immense effort be obtained from him; even then they were not freely given, but extracted like an obdurate tooth. So communication had ceased between them utterly, and it was

hardly to be wondered at that Sir Harold, who was by no means sentimental, should not be moved to any paroxysm of intense agony at the announcement of his brother's death, but when he saw Maud he ceased to be indifferent.

"Fancy poor Ralph having such a lovely daughter," he said to himself, "I expected to see an awkward red-cheeked country girl, but she looks like a countess. Ah, well, if I'd only had a daughter like that."

There were actually tears in his eyes as he thought this, and though he dashed them away with his rough hand, muttering that "he was a fool to think of such things," it was with unwonted gentleness that he spoke to Maud.

She, poor child, was very pale and unlike her old self, but she spoke quite calmly now and yielded to no further passionate outburst of grief,

The day after her father died, Arthur had first pleaded, and then gently insisted that she should rise above her despair.

"Life is too precious to be squandered in endless weeping, my darling," he said, "you are faint and ill from keeping in this close room: come down with me to your old seat by the river, and let the air and the sunshine try to comfort you. You shall not talk unless you like."

So she let him take her to the old spot, and there when she could bear it, he reminded her of what Ralph had always taught about the meaning and teaching of sorrow, and how souls must be baptized thereby into deeper heroism, and mightier power, and he was rewarded by seeing that she grew calmer as he spoke. Hers was too intense a nature to sorrow lightly, but it had no morbid element in it, and she could not watch the happy river, and the peaceful hills, the sunlight of heaven, and the fields of golden corn, without catching something of the meaning it all conveyed, and though grieving no less, bearing the burden of a quieter sorrow.

One blessed influence sorrow had already brought

upon its wings, for which Arthur was deeply grateful. There had grown a new meaning in their love for each other, she had clung to him for help, protection and support, and so had learnt that reverence, without which no woman's love is worth the name. He on the other hand while still worshipping her, as something higher and better than himself, was drawn nearer to her by the sense of her weakness.

Mr. Hallett, the new clergyman, had come to Elverley, and was to commence his clerical labours at once. He was a good man, of unblemished orthodoxy, frequently spoken of in religious newspapers, as "an able advocate of sound doctrine, and evangelical truth," but he could no more fill Ralph's place in the hearts and affections of his parishioners than he could have designed St. Paul's Cathedral or written 'Paradise Lost.'

The funeral was perfectly simple, the hideous black draperies, and ignorant misapplication of baronial symbols, the mutes hired to look

miserable for so much an hour, and the other absurd and offensive surroundings, with which the dread majesty and mystery of death are daily profaned, were entirely dispensed with. The sunshine streamed on no face, whose expression was a lie, the tears shed upon that grave, were as sincere as the hearts of angels.

The churchyard was crowded, Maud glanced round at them all, and saw many faces quite strange to her. Some had come from long distances, and in memory of days long past; others had lived in daily intercourse with him till his death. They were of all classes of society, and formed a strange group around the grave. Lord Offborough, the lieutenant of the county, and one of the lowest of the Elverley farm labourers wept over their common grief side by side.

The Reverend Ezekiel Hallet looked at all this with considerable surprise. He knew something of popularity. After the publication of his books

on "Pernicious Heresies," and "The Doctrinal errors of our time," he had met with much applause, and when he had delivered a course of sermons against the heresy of a brother divine who had denied the material flames of hell; even the aisles of his church had been crowded with listeners. On this occasion enthusiasm ran to such a height that he had been presented, a week after their conclusion, with a silver tea and coffee service and a most flattering address, in which he was publicly thanked for 'having established a scriptural truth finally and for ever;' but he had never won the love of human hearts—that needed finer perceptions, and sympathy more delicate than he could ever possess; and now he saw with utter amazement strong men shedding tears as freely as women. What could be the secret by which all this was wrought?

It was that Ralph had trodden humbly in the footsteps of Him whom the common people heard gladly, that his teaching in the pulpit and out of

it, had been that God was the Father of the great human family in no abstract sense, but as an eternal truth, that they were girt round on every side by divine love, even though they knew it not, and therefore necessity was laid upon them to quit themselves like men and heroes in the tragic battle-field of life. Most of all, perhaps, it was because he had listened patiently to their sorrows, sympathising as only royal hearts can, and because they saw, what he never did, that his own life had realised the ideal of Christian chivalry he bade them strive to attain.

When the service was over, and the last flowers had been thrown into the open grave, Sir Harold Atherton, Maud and Arthur walked back to the vicarage, without a single word.

The will was written on a single sheet of note paper, and consisted only of half-a-dozen lines. He bequeathed everything of which he died possessed, absolutely and without qualification, to Maud, mentioning in an informal letter to her

some trifling mementos he wished given to friends. He left a valuable library and a few fine paintings, otherwise the whole estate was not worth a hundred pounds.

The other papers read were those relating to Maud's fortune. These also were very brief and simple, the money left her by Sir James Atherton was to remain untouched until her twenty-first birthday, when it became absolutely her own. In the event of Ralph Atherton dying before she attained her majority, provision was made for her living in the house of her guardian, Horace Arvale, Esquire, of London.

"Who is Horace Arvale?" asked Arthur, who had been listening rather anxiously to the last few clauses.

"He's a stock-broker or something of that kind, I believe," said Sir Harold, "I know he used to be a college friend of poor Ralph's, but I can't tell you anything about him now, except that he's got the vilest carriage horses in London.

I wouldn't give him five pounds for the lot of 'em. Do you know anything about him, Maud?"

"I have heard papa speak of him, uncle," she replied, "they were dear friends at college, indeed there was quite a romantic attachment between them. And here is an unopened letter for me with the London post-mark, it came yesterday, perhaps it is from him."

Maud broke the seal and read as follows—

"Dear Miss Atherton,

By the will of the late Sir James Atherton, your grandfather, you inherit a legacy with the details of which you are doubtless familiar. As I am appointed executor to this bequest, and am also your guardian till such time as you shall have attained your majority, I beg to state that I shall be happy to receive you at once into my house, and if you will write me word when it is convenient for you to come to

London, I will make all needful arrangements for your proper reception,

I am,

Yours truly,

Horace Arvale."

"Rather an extraordinary letter to write to the daughter of one's dearest friend," thought Arthur, but he said nothing.

"I will write to him at once," said Maud, "and next Thursday I will go to London. That will give me nearly a week for necessary arrangements."

"Yes," said Sir Harold, "that's sensible, and now——"

He was interrupted by the entrance of Sarah, who brought him in a telegram.

"Excuse me," he said, and read it eagerly. "Ah, yes, I expected so, I must return to London by the next train—on most important business."

His horses had gained the first two places in that morning's race, of which highly gratifying

circumstance the telegram informed him. After all he was only human, and could he be expected to be sorrowful when he was sure of winning twenty thousand pounds, and the admiring congratulations of envious friends?"

So with a look of exultation, struggling to hide itself beneath an expression of sorrowful resignation, he returned to London, leaving Arthur and Maud alone.

They stood at the window watching the little river Elva, which flowed on merrily in the distance as though life were bright as a day in June.

"This is a beautiful world, Arthur," said Maud, breaking the silence, "but it's a disappointing one."

"It is disappointing," he replied, "but surely the whole interest of life lies in it's struggles. Our thought about what life means will mainly influence us in the way we meet sorrow and defeat. Call it a game as I used to do, and then

when hopes are shattered we must throw up the cards, but call it a battle as your father would have done, and then surrender to despair becomes cowardly and false."

"Dear Arthur," said Maud, "you are right. I am certain you are right. I will not quarrel with the world. How can I while you are in it? But will you tell me what your plans are?"

"I go to London as I intended before, to fight the world," he said, in a lighter tone. "It's rather a stolid world I'm afraid, and the 'open sesame' to its favor, is not easily pronounced, but with your love to inspire me I am not afraid of the issue. I shall call upon your guardian directly after you are settled, and astonish him by the announcement that I—a poor man without any definite prospects—intend to marry his ward."

"Suppose he objects."

"He is certain to object, and we must wait patiently till his authority ceases. Then we will be married, and he may go to—the Stock

Exchange. We are young darling and can wait."

Maud looked up into his face, her bright eyes radiant with love and truth, and said with something faintly like her old smile—

"You need not fear for my constancy Arthur, I will wait, if need be, for your sake till I grow to be an old woman."

So they plighted their troth, on the sweet vow of eternal heart loyalty, and each felt strong to bear the future in the calm certainty of the other's love.

CHAPTER XIV.

'Her letters penned in hours of happy leisure,
Have long been sanctified by secret tears,
Love plucked a rose-bud, which he gave to Pleasure,
But Sorrow treasured it in after years.'

Next day Arthur called at the vicarage to see Maud once more before leaving Elverley for London.

"I have been looking through my father's papers," she said, "it would be a long task, for there are a great many of them, only they are so carefully arranged, that it is easy to see which are of importance and which are not. There is a diary he kept about twenty years ago. I cannot

trust myself to read that yet, but I have made a discovery."

"What is it?"

"A parcel of letters," she answered softly, "written by my mother. You know she died when I was born, and I have never been able to picture what she was like, but I know now, and I understand too, why my father was sometimes so grave and sad."

Arthur raised the letters she gave him to his lips, as though he were kissing the hand that penned the love-words long ago.

"We will read them all through together, some day Arthur," said Maud, "but there is one I want you to read now."

He took the letter—the ink was faded, but the words were still legible. Together he and Maud read silently as follows—

"You ask me, Ralph, to write you the story of my life. A year ago, I should have dreaded to recall a past so sad, but now your love makes

harder things than this easy to be done. I cannot make a connected story of it, for much that I must tell happened in my childhood, but I will give you the pictures of the past I have not forgotten.

" My first remembrance is of a palace, on the banks of a great river. Here I grew from a baby to a child, though how long we lived there I cannot tell, I know that my mother was young and beautiful, and that in those days she seemed always laughing. The sound of an oar breaking through the water, or the musical laughter of a beautiful girl, always recalls one picture to my mind. I can see it before me now. Let me write its description down.

" It is evening, and the clouds are still red with the light of sunset. My mother has been pointing out the bright tints to my little sister Laura, and to me. Laura is only three years old, I am nearly five. Presently we hear the splash of oars, and see my father's boat on the river below. He

waves a laughing salute to my mother, who tosses him a white rose, which she takes from her beautiful black hair, he catches it and throws her a ring which sparkles with jewels, and I hear my mother's silvery laughter as she puts it on her finger. This trivial occurrence starts out vividly from my entangled memories of early childhood.

" My father was a young Italian noble, and (I know it now though I was too young to understand it then) had married my mother without the knowledge of his family. She was beautiful, accomplished and good, but she was the daughter of a peasant, and this, their ancient pride would never have forgiven her. But I know he loved her passionately, he would sit for hours listening to her playing the harp, or singing some sweet old Italian ballad. You praise my voice, dear Ralph, but her's was far more beautiful than mine.

" One evening my father came home with a new look of pride and joy in his face. He took my

mother in his arms and kissed her fondly, then I heard him say to her—

"'My queen, listen to what I say. My cousin, with whom I quarrelled long ago, is dead, and our marriage need be a secret no longer. I inherit his estates and am rich, and you shall have the proudest nobles in Rome at your feet before a year. Beatrice, too,' he said, turning to me, 'shall wear diamonds in her hair, and ride on a horse like the beautiful court ladies. And little Laura shall have —'"

"My mother put one of her little white hands laughingly on his mouth, and told him not to drive us mad with promises, but I saw in her eyes that her first thought was of the things she would get for her children.

"We passed a merry evening, he and my mother singing or telling us stories, till it was time to go to bed, then he kissed us fondly and said we would go to Rome to-morrow.

"But about midnight there was a great noise

outside the gates, as though a number of people were clamouring for admission; then I heard my mother give a loud piercing shriek, which I shall never forget even if I live to be old. Little Laura began to cry, but I leaped out of bed and ran down stairs in my night-dress to see what was the matter. When I saw what it was, a feeling of faintness came over me that I think must be like death. My father lay upon the marble-floor dead. He had been stabbed from behind by some unknown assassin, and the two rough men whom I saw, with a childish dread that they were his murderers, finding him in the street had recognised him and borne him home. At first I thought my mother was dead too, for she had fainted away when she saw their ghastly burden, and she lay as unconscious of all around her as he. One of the servants carried me up to bed, and told me to try and sleep. I lay awake for a long time listening to the cathedral chimes, wondering why the Christ, who was strong and

merciful, could have suffered that cruel hand to stab with such deadly truth; but at last, wearied with thinking, I fell asleep.

"But my mother did not sleep. She sat all night long watching the moonlight reflected in the river. I think if she had not had her children to live for she would have killed herself, for when I saw her in the morning the laughter had gone from her eyes for ever, and her beautiful hair, which I have heard my father call the loveliest in the world, had turned quite white.

"After that day sorrows came fast upon us, my mother was unable to prove her marriage, the priest who had married them was dead, and the only witness of the wedding had left the country and been lost sight of long before, she had no written proof of it, and if, as I believe, there was any evidence among my father's papers it was suppressed by the heir, his younger brother, into whose hands everything fell.

"So we were turned out of our home with

absolutely nothing. We, who had known nothing but luxury, came into Rome with scarcely a florin in the world.

"'You are nine years old now, my Beatrice,' my mother said to me, 'and must help me to bear patiently the pain of living.'

"I said that I would try, and I did; but ours was a weary life, for though she toiled at needle-work till her delicate fingers bled, we were very poor. Often we had not enough to eat, and I would say to her—

"Mother let me go out into the streets and sing, you say I have a sweet voice, and I know people will give me silver money, and then I could buy you fruit and wine.

"But she always made the same reply. 'No you are a noble's daughter, and you must not behave as though your father had been a peasant.'

"But she grew weaker everyday, then I went out into the streets and sang by stealth, persuading her that all the money I brought was payment

for her embroidery. She never suspected the truth.

"One night she called me to her side, and said,—

"'Beatrice, are you brave enough to bear anything I have to tell you?'

"I said 'yes,' but I know my lips trembled with a dread foreknowledge of the truth.

"'Then my darling,' she whispered 'I know that I am dying. In a few days you and little Laura will be alone in the world.'

"I remember throwing myself passionately at her feet, and crying out some mad prayers that I might die too, but she checked me.

"'You must live,' she said, 'for little Laura's sake, and the Saints will protect and feed you both.'

"Then she fastened round my neck a gold chain with a locket attached, containing my father's portrait, painted on ivory, and a lock of his hair. Another one she clasped round little Laura's neck, containing her own likeness and

hair. Both were engraved with her maiden name, *Beatrice Genari.*

" That night I crept out of bed to watch my mother as she slept. The moonlight streamed through the windows on her fair pale face, and on little Laura lying asleep in her arms, smiling at her dreams. I watched her for some minutes, then tried to sleep again myself, but the memory of that pale face haunted me, and I could not rest. I stood beside her bed once more. She had not moved, and a sick feeling of dread came over me, as I saw how still the face was on which the moonlight fell. I called her gently by her name, but she did not stir, then I laid my hands on her bosom, but it was cold with the icy chill of death.

" She was dead, and Laura and I were left to face the world alone. I was only eleven, but I felt I must be the child's mother now, though I was only two years older than she, but for this my heart would have broken.

"There were one or two jewels in my mother's room that my father had given her, these the woman of the house sold for me to pay for the funeral. She was a kind-hearted creature, whose husband was cruel to her, and I suspect now, that she made up what was wanting from her own small purse.

"When the funeral was over I said to her, 'I can get bread enough for us both by singing in the streets. Will you let the room to me as you did to my mother?'

"And she answered, 'If my Giulo were not so passionate, I would take you both for my own children. That I dare not do, but you shall never pay me for the room, and you may live in it as long as it is mine.'

"It may seem impossible to you, Ralph, that two children could face the world alone and unaided. But it happened exactly as I write. We wandered about the streets of Rome, sometimes singing, sometimes playing with other

children, sometimes talking about our father and mother and the days that seemed so long ago. Sometimes we sang to rich people and they gave us money, sometimes to peasants who could only give us bread or fruit. It was a strange fantastic life, and often it made me weary, anxious and sad, but little Laura grew bright and gay. She had no anxiety for she had boundless faith in me, and shook all responsibility and thought from off her pretty shoulders.

"How beautiful she was! I remember once we had been singing before a great white house, where a lady was sitting in the balcony, when a servant asked us to come in, saying that the lady wished to speak to us. I hesitated for a moment for I was afraid of grand houses, but little Laura laughed at me, 'Come on, Trichy,' she said, and as I could never refuse her anything, we went into the house together. There the lady spread daintier fare before us than we had tasted for years, and after we had finished and she had filled

Laura's pockets with sweets, she asked me our story, and with child-like confidence in gentleness I told her everything.

"She listened thoughtfully then she asked me my name.

"'Beatrice Genari,' I answered, for not knowing my father's name I always gave my mother's.

"'And your sister's?'

"'Her name is Laura.'

"'Beatrice,' said the lady, 'once I had a little girl whom I loved dearly, but she died. If you will part with Laura, I will make her a lady, and treat her as though she were my own child, and I will give you more money than you ever had in your life.'

"I said 'ask Laura, if she wishes it I will part cheerfully with her,' but my heart beat wildly with fear of what her reply might be.

"'What do you say Laura,' said the lady, 'would you like to live with me and have all these beautiful things for your own?'

"'Altro,' cried the child, 'I should love it of all things, but Trichy would live here too?'

"'No, you must part with Beatrice if you wish to live with me.'

"'Then I will not come,' said Laura indignantly, 'I thought you were kind and good, but you must be wicked and cruel to think of such a thing. Let us go Trichy, I would not part with you to be Queen of Italy.'

"But as we were going the lady called us back, and whispered to me—

"'The time may come when you will think differently—if so come again to me.'

"Then she forced a gold piece of money into each of our hands, kissed us, and let us go.

"But the time did come when I remembered her words. Laura was very ill, and the doctor said unless she had things which I was too poor to buy her, she must die.

"Then I went again to the lady in the great white house and told her all. She sent at once

for Laura, and put her under the best medical treatment. 'You need not be alarmed for her,' she told me, 'the doctors say she is certain to recover. You and she had better not meet each other again, or she will not stay with me.'

"I answered, 'you are right, my lady, she is your child now and I will obey you.'

"She would have given me money but I would not take it, my one yearning now was to die.

"I was about fourteen, but it was with a mother's tenderness rather than a sister's that I loved my beautiful Laura. Every night when the darkness was falling, I would call at the great house and ask the servants how she was, and the answer always was—

"'She is better.'

"At last they told me she was almost as strong as ever, and that the doctor was not coming any more; then I kissed the iron gate and I have never been near it since.

"Ah, Ralph! it is love that makes up real life.

Even now as I write, though all this is years ago, my tears are falling fast and I cannot see the words that I have written.

"I cannot tell how I lived after the separation. I still sung for my bread, but I had grown grave and sad, and people did not give me money so freely as before; at last, one day when I had been singing an English ballad, a gentleman who had been listening eagerly, spoke to me, and I saw with wonder that the tears were in his eyes.

"'Where did you learn that song?' he asked me. Although he could speak Italian well, I could tell by his accent that he was English. His face was handsome and had a strange expression of sadness that fascinated me.

"I told him an English servant long before had taught it to me, and that I had learnt something of that language when I was quite a child.

"'How old are you now?' he asked, with a smile of tender pity.

"'I am a woman now,' I answered sadly, 'I am fourteen.'

"He said 'I am an artist, and you are very beautiful. Will you come to the house where I live, and let me paint your eyes and hair?'

"I went to his house next morning and sat still while he painted and talked to me. I told him my whole story and by degrees he told me his. He was an Englishman and very rich, but years before he had passionately loved a lady of whom I reminded him. She was dead, and it was because my eyes and hair were like hers that he loved to watch my face and paint it. He had spoken to me first because the song I was singing was one she used to love and he fancied my voice was like hers.

"One day he said to me—

"'Beatrice, if the beautiful lady whom I loved had lived she would have been my wife, and there might have been born to us a daughter like yourself. I am rich and you are poor, but we

are both lonely, why should we not love and comfort each other always. You shall call me father and I will love you tenderly as though you were my dead love's child.'

"I cannot tell what I said, but a great love for him grew up in my heart, for I felt I was orphaned no longer.

"I lived in his house three years and a half, and few daughters know such love as he gave me; I had masters to teach me many studies and accomplishments, I had beautiful dresses and rich jewels, I had more money than I could spend, and my lightest wish, my idlest caprice he would have granted though it demanded the sacrifice of his fortune.

"But soon after my seventeenth birthday he died suddenly, leaving no will.

"I had still the jewels he had given me, and a little money. Living with him all this time I had learned to talk and write English almost as well as Italian. I thought I would go to England and be a governess there.

" One thing still bound me to Italy. It was the thought of my little sister, with whom I had wandered through the streets of Rome hand in hand. My second father had made many fruitless enquiries for her, but just after his death a messenger of his returned, saying that the child had gone with the family that had adopted her to Florence and there died.

" Sometimes since I have wondered whether he spoke falsely, being weary of the quest, and knowing no more money was forthcoming; it may be so and Laura may yet be alive, but I never thought of doubting his words then.

" We had many English friends in Rome. One lady told me her sister (who lived in London) wanted a governess for her children. She was going home and would take me if I liked. I consented gladly and came to teach Lady Aldred's children—this was five months' ago.

" Dearest Ralph, the rest of my life is told as I write your name. For me, poor, lonely, friendless,

you have sacrificed everything, you have comforted me when my heart was sad, you have stirred in my breast a passionate delight in life, which five months' ago seemed a weary thing, you are gentle, brave and chivalrous, and I have but one thing to give you in return, that is yours already.

" For with the passionate devotion of a woman's heart, I am always,

" Most lovingly your own,

" Beatrice Genari."

So the letter ended. There were also a few withered violets, and a lock of rich brown hair wonderfully like Maud's. Maud locked them away silently with the packet of letters, and after a few sweet words of farewell on which they lingered, like the tremulous vibration of musical harmonies that are loth to die, she and Arthur parted.

CHAPTER XV.

. . . . "Turning to Alice, the soul of the first Alice looked out at her eyes with such a reality of representment, that I became in doubt which of them stood there before me or whose that bright hair was."

Essays of Elia.
(The Dream Children.)

A WEEK afterwards Maud left Elverley. The Reverend Ezekiel Hallet had decided within his own mind that the villagers, were the most unaccountable people he had ever seen. He had scarcely recovered from his amazement at their behaviour in the churchyard, when he began to realise their devotion to Maud. "I have no objection to the young lady," he said to himself

reflectively, " she is very beautiful I dare say, but she holds some very unsound doctrines, and as she reads novels I am afraid she has a carnal mind, but these people can talk of nothing else. It's very unaccountable."

However the last farewell was spoken at length, and Maud drove to Entwich *en route* for London. Some of the bolder spirits among the youths had proposed unharnessing the horses and dragging the carriage themselves, but the distance being twelve miles and the calmer minds demonstrating the arithmetical impossibility of reaching Entwich in this way in time for the train, the chivalrous scheme was abandoned.

But they mustered in great force notwithstanding to see her go, though the cheers they gave were rather faltering. Even after the village was far behind, straggling children with flowers in their hands, and tears in their eyes, made their appearance in the most unlooked-for fashion, forcing their way through hedges, with a regal disregard

of thorns. At last however this was over too, and Maud was in the train feeling the dreariness of existence as she had never in her life-time done before.

Nature cares nothing for our joys and griefs. It was a beautiful fancy though rather a conceited one, that the world's great heart throbbed with passionate joy or pitiful agony, in sympathy with our own, that the stars flashed brighter when we won the laurel wreath, shining with paler lustre, when we learnt the bitterness of failure. But it is not so. The bleak winds, we fancied to be Nature's cry mingling with our own, moaned just as piteously round the homes where hearts beat high with grateful love of life; the sunshine we thought heaven's smile upon the plighted troth of happy lovers streamed through darkened windows on the white and rigid features of the dead.

But Maud looking out of the railway carriage window, could scarcely help believing that a material change had fallen upon everything.

The month was September, but already many of the leaves had fallen from the trees, and the whole country seemed blurred and indistinct, from the heavy downfall of rain. The journey seemed interminable. Ridiculous little stations with such depressing names as Little Binkleby were stopped at, apparently for no other cause than a conversation between the engine driver and the local railway porter—a misanthrope who combined the functions of station master, parish beadle, policeman and hard-bake manufacturer. Then the engine seemed as voracious as a healthy cannibal, and demanded feeding by heart-rending shrieks on every possible occasion. Maud found it impossible to escape from the depressing influence of all this, nor were her spirits materially heightened by a stout lady sitting opposite, who offered her sandwiches and a brandy flask as light and nourishing refreshment, and who was terribly loquacious on the subject of babies. At last, however, the air trembled with

the rhythmic harmony of a sonorous snore, the excellent matron was asleep and Maud was left to her own thoughts undisturbed.

Broken thoughts they were — of her father whom she had loved so well—of her beautiful young Italian mother whose strange story told in simple womanly fashion haunted her like the remembrance of a plaintive song—of the villagers who had made her life so happy—of her child-lover sleeping near her father in the rustic churchyard—of Arthur Calverley whose love was the one thing that made all this sorrow bearable —and of the new life that lay before her.

At last the fragrant breath of the Bermondsey tan-yards apprised them that their journey was nearly over.

The stout matron woke up and gave an audible sniff as though she scented odours of Paradise.

"It's a very healthy smell, my dear," she said to Maud, "you needn't be afraid to in'ale it."

Horace Arvale had written Maud that some

one would be there to meet her, and he himself came forward as she alighted from the train.

"Miss Atherton, I am sure," he said quickly. Maud answered in the affirmative, wondering how he knew; upon this he turned to the coachman and gave directions as to her luggage in the same rapid manner. After which he became thoughtful and apparently forgot her altogether.

While the coachman was collecting the luggage he stood brooding over some hidden thought, and she had leisure to observe his face, the first glimpse of which had disappointed her.

Horace Arvale was a man of about two or three and forty, tall and thin, with a face deeply wrinkled and hair prematurely grey. He had good features and might have been handsome but for the eager restlessness expressed by his eyes and mouth. Their expression was so strange that Maud half fancied they possessed a Satanic power of fascination. At first she could not think where she had seen anything like it

before, but at last she remembered it was in a painting by one of the old masters in Sir Herbert Stansfeld's possession, of a defeated gamester who was playing his last card and knew that it was useless, and she could not help thinking a guardian of more common-place appearance would have been preferable.

Yet he spoke very kindly to her, and handed her into the carriage with great respect. She soon discovered that he had two distant personalities—one dreamy and abstracted, the other restless and irritable.

With all her grief Maud's keen sense of the ridiculous noted this.

"It's very uncomfortable" she thought to have a guardian who seems to have something to do with the powers of darkness. In his restless mood he looks as if he were about to sign that contract the German legends are so fond of, and when he broods he looks as though he were repenting the bargain. I shall call him Dr. Faustus."

"Have we far to go," she enquired for the sake of saying something.

"No," he replied, "that is to say, not very far."

After which brilliant conversation, they both relapsed into silence.

At last the carriage stopped at a large house, which looked aristocratic, ancient, grimy, and dull. Maud shivered slightly at the sight of it, and described it afterwards in a letter to Clara Corrie, as an epitaph written in bricks and mortar.

A condescending footman opened the door, to which action another individual in gorgeous livery, gave moral support by gazing pensively at the hats and umbrellas in the stand.

"Perhaps you would like to change your dress before I introduce you to my wife and daughter?" said Mr. Arvale.

"Thank you," she replied, "I should prefer to do so."

"Then if you please, Miss, I'll show you your rooms."

The speaker was a plump fresh looking servant, who, Maud saw at a glance, was nervously eager to please and very neatly dressed.

The house was furnished with great taste and refinement, and the gloom did not penetrate to the interior. Maud looked with more satisfaction than she had yet felt at the large rooms set apart for herself, everything was luxurious and costly, without being (as in the case of some mushroom millionaires) offensively so.

"But if you please Miss, I'm to be your maid," said the plump servant timidly.

"I'm glad to hear it," replied Maud, "you are really the only object I've seen to-day that looks fresh. What is your name?"

"Fanny, Miss." And with a curtsey the maiden who bore that name glided to the other end of the room and noiselessly produced a dress from one of Maud's boxes, divining by some

mysterious instinct, (inscrutable to the dull minds of us men) in which box the dress in question lay.

"I don't think I need trouble you any more, Fanny," said Maud. "I am not a lady of fashion you know, and never shall be."

"Oh, but Missis 'ud never forgive me, Miss, if I anyways neglected my duties."

"I don't want you to do that," said her young Mistress. "Your chief duties will be to be agreeable as often as possible and to bear with me when I'm cross, which is very frequent."

Here a bell rang. "That's the warning bell, Miss," said Fanny, "as rings half-an-hour afore dinner. Do let me do your beautiful hair, Miss, even if I mayn't dress you."

Maud consented to this as a compromise, and smiled at her maid's triumph when her toilet was completed.

"There, Miss," she said, breathlessly, "there an't many ladies in London looks as beautiful as you."

By which remark Fanny revealed her powers of artistic appreciation and the haziness of her etymological ideas.

The second bell ringing Maud went down stairs without further delay.

Mrs. Arvale was probably two or three years older than her husband, and very unlike him in all respects. The gentlest critic would never have called her handsome though he chanced to be short-sighted as well as charitable. The most striking characteristic in her face was obstinacy which made her features look as though they had been unskilfully carved in wood. Her eyes were obstinate, having an unpleasant habit of glaring fixedly at the person whom she was addressing; her nose was obstinate, having an Excelsior tendency that was positively irritating, her lips were obstinate, never curving by any chance into a smile, and to crown all, her hair was obstinate, each individual hair possessing a wiry individuality of its own, and being as

difficult to put down as a refractory member of the Church congress.

Maud turned with great relief from the mother to the daughter. Blanche Arvale was a graceful girl of nineteen, with a small slight figure, dark eyes, and a timid shrinking manner.

She gave Maud a quick glance of involuntary admiration, and held out a very small white hand which she seemed rather surprised to find was cordially clasped.

"I'm glad to see you, Miss Atherton," said Mrs. Arvale, in a voice as sharply metallic as her hair. "Of course you're tired. Sit down."

One of her peculiarities was her fondness of short sentences; she rarely adopted any punctuation but full stops, and prided herself upon saying everything as concisely as possible. With the same end in view she spoke rapidly, and clearly had not the faintest conception of what vocal inflection meant.

The dinner was excellent and splendidly served.

Horace Arvale was an epicure and not only widely renowned for his sumptuous banquets, but almost equally particular when they dined alone.

Still Maud felt rather bored by it. She poor child was not in very high spirits and said little, Blanche only spoke twice, once to refuse claret the other time to remark that the turtle soup was too salt, a fact which her mother who had not tasted it denied positively in a tone admitting of as little reply as a Papal edict.

Horace Arvale could talk well when he chose, which was not often. Once or twice when he spoke to Maud he became animated and then his conversation was interesting, even brilliant, but he always relapsed into the old abstracted manner.

"He's rather like a phosphorescent fish," Maud thought, "emitting unexpected flashes and then becoming black again." She noticed also that he drank wine very freely, as though it were his invariable custom.

It was a great relief to rise from the dinner table at last, and when they went into the drawing room, her eyes brightened at the sight of the grand piano.

"You play and sing Miss Arvale, of course," she said.

"I have learnt," was the reply, "at least all kinds of masters have tried to teach me, but I have no musical talent. You have," she added timidly, "I see it in your eyes."

"Nonsense child," said Mrs. Arvale sharply, "you can do nothing of the sort. Eyes have got nothing to do with it. The best player I ever heard was blind."

Poor Blanche meekly assented, and sat down to the piano without a further word. The piece she had selected to play was one of Beethoven's wonderful sonatas. It was easy to see she had studied long and practised much, for she played with great correctness and mechanical finish. But expression was utterly lacking, and the whole

meaning of the sonata appeared to have escaped her. Maud listened wonderingly; could it be that the girl had no poetry or music in her composition? Apparently not, for she rose from the piano wearily as conscious of her failure, as any listener could be.

"I can't play," she said, "do let me hear you Miss Atherton."

Horace Arvale had been reading the money article in the 'Times,' as regardless of his daughter's music as it was possible to be. But directly Maud struck a few wild notes on the piano, he began to listen.

She played one of the 'songs without words' and he dropped the newspaper without noticing it. Then she began to extemporise in her brilliant erratic way, all her sad thoughts finding utterance in "the mystic inarticulate speech of music," while her guardian became almost as unconscious of his surroundings as she. Then thought succeeding thought in rapid succession

she began to sing. It was an old Italian ballad she had found among her father's papers, the plaintive cry of a sad heart for a joy that had ceased to be. Her beautiful contralto voice gave the soft notes and musical Italian words with a sweetness and passion that bound two of her listeners with a magician's spell.

Mrs. Arvale, however, who could scarcely distinguish between a cow and a nightingale sat unmoved till, the song being over, she happened to glance at her husband and gave a shrill exclamation of astonishment not unlike the voice of a steam-whistle. Maud turned hastily round and saw the reason of her cry in one glance of her guardian's face.

Horace Arvale had risen from his chair and was leaning against the mantel piece for support. His face was very pale and his eyes full of tears, but even this was not so strange as the expression of his eyes. A quick fancy passed through Maud's mind that sightless eyes miraculously

opened to behold the light of heaven would look like that. It was a painful look for it had the appearance of wildly seeking something it could not find, and yet there was a yearning tenderness in it which softened his face almost into beauty.

All this Maud saw in one rapid glance, for as though his wife's harsh voice had broken the spell that bound him the look passed from his face like a shadow, and his features assumed their wonted expression of moody repose.

"What's the matter, Horace?" said his wife, with even more than usual sharpness. "You look like a ghost."

He made no reply but sat moodily looking at the paper without reading a word. Mrs. Arvale repeated her question without any effect.

"It's late," said that exemplary matron. "I'm going to bed. You go too, Blanche, and——" She was about to speak peremptorily to Maud but thought better of it.

Maud spared her the trouble by saying "good

night," at once being glad of the prospect of a little quiet reflection by herself. In her own room, when she had locked the door and let loose the trailing tresses of her long brown hair, she was able to pursue her thoughts in peace.

"It's a strange house," she murmured, half-aloud, "I can't quite understand any member of the family except Mrs. Arvale; there's nothing mystical about her. I never saw such lips in my life. They remind me of the leathery dogmatism of a jujube. I wonder if they were ever in her lifetime kissed. Mr. Hallet said he hoped I should soon find some Christian work to do. One of the first things I'll do when I recover something of my old spirits shall be to torment her. Everybody here is afraid of her so it will be equally a duty and a pleasure."

Her bright eyes flashed with something of her old merriment at this reflection. Though her heart was sad and weary she could not help a passing gleam of mischief.

"Then there's Blanche," she mused, in a more thoughtful vein, "she is so silent and timid that it's not easy to form a satisfactory opinion of her. I should be inclined to think her a very commonplace little girl but for her eyes, there is suppressed passion in them—of that I feel certain.

"And Mr. Arvale is an incarnate enigma. At one moment he bores me, at another he fascinates me. I sit down to the piano and he is reading the paper in the most prosaic fashion. I look up, and find him looking at me as though I had uttered a secret he had been hiding all his life. What a remarkable look that was, I wonder——"

And Maud trailed off into a profound reverie on the events crowded into the last few weeks, which was only broken by the church clocks noisily proclaiming the hour of midnight.

All the inmates of the house were asleep except Horace Arvale, he had writing to do, he said, which would keep him at work another hour.

His desk was open and his papers were spread

out upon the table, but he neither looked at them nor touched a pen, but sat with his head resting on his hand in deep thought. Once his lips moved and he murmured, "She is like her—she is wonderfully like her."

What was he dreaming of as he sat alone in the dimly-lighted room? Of greater wealth, of larger undertakings, of mighty enterprises that should make him envied and renowned? Or was he thinking of eyes whose tender light was shrouded in the darkness of death; of a hand that might have led him into nobler paths than he had ever trodden; of a heart that might have kept his own pure in the sight of the angels of God?

"If she had ever been mine," he muttered, rising at last, "I should have been something widely different from the man I am."

He extinguished the lights and left the room with a look of weariness upon his face sadder to behold than any expression of acute agony.

May God's pity rest upon the men who have once loved purely and truly, only in after life to be recreant to the holy memory, for He alone knoweth how unutterable is their need of help.

CHAPTER XVI.

" For in a minute there are many days—
O ! by that count I shall be much in years
Ere I again behold my Romeo."

Shakespeare.

A FEW days after Maud's arrival in London Horace Arvale was sitting alone in his library, when the more languid of the footmen brought him in a card, and condescendingly drawled something which was inaudible.

" What did you say ? " said his master sharply, " gentleman's waiting sir, in the drawing-room —says he must see you on important business," said the tall footman, rather abashed.

"Show him in here then," said Mr. Arvale, and in a few moments, the footman who had become languid again, ushered in Arthur Calverley, and retired much fatigued by such unwonted exertion.

"You will forgive me if I remind you Mr. Calverley," said Horace Arvale who seemed unusually nervous and irritable this morning, "that my time is precious, and that I shall be glad if you will be as brief as possible in explaining to what I am indebted for the honour of the visit."

"I will detain you very few minutes," said Arthur, "I am here simply because I consider myself bound to be frank and open with Miss Atherton's guardian, and I wish to state exactly in what relationship I stand with regard to that young lady."

Horace Arvale started slightly at the mention of Maud's name, but made no reply.

"I love Maud Atherton," said Arthur in his

clear manly voice that never sounded so musical as when he uttered her name, " far more profoundly than I could tell. Her lighted look is more precious to me than any words could convey. Her beauty, her accomplishments, her brilliant endowments of heart and mind, will command her love and admiration wherever she goes, but though far better men than I might love her, I do not believe she could ever be worshipped by anyone more tenderly than by me."

Horace Arvale made no remark whatever, but Arthur saw that he was listening attentively.

" Let that pass," he resumed. " I only mention it, because Miss Atherton being an heiress, I of course lay myself open to suspicions of a mean and degrading nature. That I am prepared for, anyone who knows Miss Atherton knows how absurdly insignificant the wealth of a thousand empires seems in comparison with her, and as for the people, who are stupid enough to think otherwise, or imagine me stupid enough to do so, I

have learnt to bear their unfavourable opinion with considerable composure."

"Have you finished?" was the dry rejoinder.

"Not quite—I think you know my father slightly Mr. Arvale, I have been educated for no profession, and have always had it impressed upon me that I was to be his heir, but his second marriage has changed all that and left me, with the exception of a few hundred pounds, without either money or definite prospects."

A look passed over Mr. Arvale's face that was not promising; he would have spoken, but Arthur said quickly.

"One word more. To Miss Atherton I have spoken as freely on this point as I have done to you, she honours me with her trust and love, and is content to wait years if need be 'till I can give her a home."

"May I ask," said Mr. Arvale, very deliberately, "what all this has to do with me?"

"You are Maud's guardian," returned Arthur,

"and so had a right to this explanation, but my visit had another and a less disinterested motive. I wish to ask your permission, to be an occasional guest in your house, I do not ask you to recognise any engagement or sanction any betrothal. Such a request would be unreasonable, I simply ask the favour I have mentioned, which I am aware you have a perfect right to refuse."

"I am glad you recognise that right," said the other, drily, "for I intend to avail myself of it. In reply to your confidence, Mr. Calverley, I have merely to observe that I congratulate you on your candour but must distinctly refuse to be a party to anything so monstrously absurd. And with that we will close the interview."

"No, Mr. Arvale," said Arthur, quietly, "I must see Miss Atherton before I leave your house."

"I can refuse that also," was the reply.

"You can refuse it but you cannot prevent it. With your permission or without it I will see

Miss Atherton within a week, though you barred and bolted every door in your house."

"How could you?" asked the other.

For the first time during the interview Arthur smiled.

"There are endless ways of attaining such an object," he said, "why should I bore you by enumerating them? Of one thing you may be perfectly certain, I *will* see her somehow, and you may as well sanction it as not."

Horace Arvale paced the room irresolutely for a moment, then rang the bell and said to the servant who answered it—

"Ask Miss Atherton if she will kindly favour me with her presence for a few minutes."

The servant curtsied and withdrew, and Arthur waited Maud's arrival with a passionate eagerness very unlike the appearance of composure which he still preserved.

She came into the room a few minutes afterwards with a heightened colour, looking so

beautiful that, in his heart of hearts, Horace Arvale secretly admitted the justice of Arthur's remark touching the absurdity of comparing her fortune with herself as an object to be desired.

She and Arthur clasped hands in silence; then Mr. Arvale said, in quite a different tone to his former remarks, as though the mere presence of Maud had power over him—

"Sit down, I wish to say a few words to you both. Mr. Calverley has surprised me very much. He tells me, Maud, that something like—like an engagement exists between you. Is this at all a delusion on his part?"

There was an angry flush on Maud's face at her guardian's last words, but she answered his question in that low thrilling tone of earnestness Arthur knew so well.

"None whatever, sir. Mr. Calverley has honoured me with his love, and I love him better than anything in the broad world."

There was a quiet scorn for opposition in her

words that made the simple avowal more forcible than if it had been accompanied by protestations of constancy or by tears.

Horace Arvale felt this, and for a minute or two he fell into his abstracted mood, then he said to Arthur—

"If I have spoken harshly to you I am sorry. You may be actuated by honourable motives——"

Arthur interrupted him by saying quietly—"You know I am."

This Mr. Arvale would have denied, but the steady look with which Arthur regarded him was disconcerting, so he continued as though Arthur had not spoken.

"But I should forget my duty as Miss Atherton's guardian, if I sanctioned any engagement between an heiress and a gentleman of no property whatever. Let me see—how old are you Maud?"

"I was eighteen in June," she replied, feeling an unreasonable anger with herself for not being older.

"Then for nearly three years," he continued, "I have authority over you, and if you disregard my wishes on a point like this, your fortune is forfeited. This is distinctly stated in Sir James Atherton's will. On your twenty-first birthday, my control over you ceases entirely, but until that time there must be no correspondence or communication of any kind Mr. Calverley between you and my ward. I must ask you as a man of honour to give me your word that there shall be no infraction of this rule without my knowledge and consent. If you refuse this you will compel me to put restraints upon my ward that may be painful to her, but if you are reasonable you will recognise this, and consent to the arrangement."

"I do recognise it," Arthur replied "and therefore I give your proposal a qualified consent. You require me neither to see Miss Atherton, nor write to her without your knowledge and consent. Now circumstances might arise, which would make it imperative for me to see Maud,

and in that case I tell you frankly your consent would become quite a secondary consideration, but I promise you that not even in so extreme a case as that, will I take any step without your knowledge. Are you content with that?"

Mr. Arvale considered for a moment, then answered, "I accept that promise, and with that I suppose we may close the interview."

"Certainly," Arthur replied, "there is nothing further to be said between us, but you will surely allow me five minutes conversation with Miss Atherton alone since I am not to speak to her again for nearly three years."

Horace Arvale wavered, but Maud's eyes had such a pleading earnestness in them that without another word he walked out of the room and left Maud and Arthur alone together.

He was the first to speak.

"Banishment is a very dreary sentence darling, but we must be brave and patient. The time will be over at last and then that Mephistopheles

of a guardian of yours will have no more power over you."

"He is more like Faust than Mephistopheles," she answered, trying to laugh though her eyes were full of tears. "I wish that horrid old grandfather of mine had never left me the money. I am perfectly willing to renounce it for your sake, Arthur, and then we could defy everyone, couldn't we?"

"No," said Arthur, firmly, "you must not dream of such a thing. I heartily wish you had never inherited it, and if Mr. Faustus Arvale were to disappear one morning in a cloud of blue smoke and your fortune with him, I am afraid I should care as little for the loss of your money as for the loss of your guardian, but it would be selfish and dishonourable in me to allow such a renunciation for my sake."

A large marble clock on the mantel-piece ticked with a fiendish exultation at the rapid flight of time, and now struck the hour by way of

noisily reminding them how few the remaining moments were.

"What will you do, Arthur?" she asked him, eagerly.

"I shall write," he answered, hopefully, "the literary profession is not an easy one, but it has prizes worth a lifetime's toil to gain."

"And you will win them," she said, with a look of proud belief in him, "I am certain that is your vocation, your name will be far-famed, Arthur, when we meet again."

"If I gain any destinction," he said, "it will be because the thought of you has inspired me. If you find ever in my writings a thought, a belief, or a fancy, that you think noble, true, or beautiful, its authorship is yours not mine. The three years will not seem long to me, for I have so much to strive for, and accomplish. It was one of Alfred Thorby's dreams to go out into the world, like one of Spenser's knights, and redress all wrongs, in your name, that must be my aim

now, and whatever poor laurels I may win I will bring them all to the feet of my Fairy Queene."

"Dear Arthur," she replied smiling gladly, though the long lashes of her dark blue eyes were still heavy with tears, "I am not what you think me, but I will try to be; I do not deserve your words of love and praise, but they make me more proud and happy than I can ever tell. And when this ridiculous infancy of mine is over," she added with a laugh that was suspiciously like a sob, "the first use I will make of my acknowledged womanhood shall be to surrender it to you."

The clock ticked feverishly, the few minutes for which Arthur had stipulated had elapsed already, and he expected the unwelcome sound of Horace Arvale's footstep every moment.

"You will wear the ring darling," he said, "and remember always what it means. Love—loyalty—and trust—for you and for me."

It was a diamond ring of great beauty. Arthur had enraged several jewellers, by the way he had

examined their entire stock, without his taste being satisfied. It had cost him a hundred guineas, which he could ill afford, but when he saw the diamonds flash and sparkle as though proud of their mistress, and glad to grace a hand so small and white, he thought nothing of the sacrifice.

Maud kissed the ring, then unclasped the necklace from her throat. It was the one her father had given her, with the locket attached, that had been worn by Beatrice Genari, thirty years before.

"This is the only other jewel I value," she whispered, "you know its story, wear it for my sake now, when we meet again you shall return it to me, but 'till then whenever you look at it, think it is the assurance of my faith and constancy."

She bound it round his wrist, and would have spoken further, but the sound of footsteps warned her that they must part.

They had been standing together throughout the hurried interview, holding each other's hands,

but now Arthur held her in his arms and their lips met with a long kiss, in which tenderness, trust, and farewell found more perfect utterance than in speech.

The door opened and Horace Arvale entered the room.

"You have had more than five minutes, Mr. Calverley," he said.

"I know it," Arthur replied, "and I am going."

He held Maud's hand in his a moment and pressed it tenderly, yet he spoke no further word, but bowing slightly to Mr. Arvale, left the house.

Maud went upstairs to her own room, not particularly caring to encounter either Mrs. Arvale or her guardian. There was still rather an unnatural brightness about her eyes, but it was from earnestness of purpose, not as before from tears.

"I have done with tears," she said, quietly,

"how can I despair while I have such love as his to make me strong. Yet he spoke as though all the worth lay on my side and he were nothing."

She sat by the window with her eyes fixed upon the streets below, but her thoughts were far away as her flashing eyes—the colour that fast as it went from her cheek returned as though loth to leave so fair a resting-place, and the smiles that played upon her rosy lips—confessed.

"And he will gain renown," she murmured to herself, "I am certain of it. He has genius, and there was determination in his face to day which was resistless, and in every success of his I have the profoundest joy—the sweetest triumph."

She rose from her seat with the resolution of which she spoke reflected in her own face.

"These last few weeks have brought such revolution into my life," she murmured, almost unconscious that she was thinking aloud, "they have brought me sorrow that would have crushed my heart a year ago; but they have brought me love,

and that means something better than the tearless happiness I have always known."

She stood before a mirror, and looked not vainly but with a natural pleasure at the sweet face it revealed.

"He says I am beautiful," she whispered, "I do not think I am that, but what beauty I have I will keep fresh and young for his sake, and my heart too, he shall not come back after our long separation and find me dull and miserable."

She turned to a book-case in which the old companions of her musings by the river Elva had found a home. They were a strange collection and gave no bad indication of Maud's mind. Grave works of philosophy were side by side with comedies, quaint sermons of old divines frowned in their sombre covers at finding themselves in the neighbourhood of burlesques and parodies, the 'Pilgrim's Progress' was in comfortable companionship with the 'Pickwick Papers.' George Herbert's poems were next to Butler's

'Hudibras,' and the 'Talmud' was leaning contentedly against the 'Ingoldsby Legends.'

But every book gave indications of frequent reading. Appreciative consideration too, apparently, for each was freely pencilled, and had those words of graceful criticism, which a girl of wide culture and rapid perceptions writes with a beauty and truth that seem instinctive.

She glanced at the backs of them all—plays, poems, novels, history, theology, philosophy, legendary lore, and contemporary criticism. At last she took down 'Sartor Resartus.'

"I want counsel," she said, "and Carlyle is rich in it. I have been his disciple for a long time and am not likely to be disappointed now. What advice has Herr Teufelsdrockh, of Weisnichtwo, for me?"

She opened the book at that wonderful chapter on 'the everlasting Yea,' and her eyes fell on these words—'Do the duty which lies nearest thee,

which thou knowest to be a duty. The second duty will already have become clearer.'

"When did Carlyle ever fail?" she said triumphantly, "'the duty which lies nearest to me' is to defy and horrify Mrs. Arvale, I'll do it without delay."

With which excellent decision, she replaced the book and went down stairs.

CHAPTER XVII.

"Only heaven
Means *crowned* not vanquished, when it says forgiven."
Adelaide Procter.
(A Legend of Provence.)

ON leaving Mr. Arvale's house, Arthur walked rapidly away, scarcely conscious of anything but the fact that he would probably not see Maud for three years. It was not a soothing reflection, and he could not repress the feeling that if Horace Arvale's coachman would upset him and so gently enable his spirit to take its flight to a better world, where his powers of enjoyment would probably be greater and his

powers of meddling with love affairs considerably less, the man would be a benefactor to society. Still he was not discouraged for he had not been unprepared for a reception of this nature, and though the world is rather a tough adversary to encounter single-handed, being as difficult to arouse from its indifference to us as the heroic sluggard of Dr. Watts's poem, who sensibly preferred a warm bed and his own reflections to the fatigue of listening to bad philosophy —though the world is stolid and indifferent it is not invincible, and has prizes for those who are strong enough to wrest them from its grasp.

Arthur was young and handsome, every nerve in his frame thrilling with the consciousness of fearless strength; with high spirits, rich mental endowments and iron resolution; and to one so gifted failure appears impossible.

"This is different to my mad enthusiasm of long ago," he thought, "however rough the road

may be it leads to Maud, I have a steady purpose now, and I *will* succeed."

Absorbed in his own thoughts, he had walked as far as Westminster Bridge without noticing it, and was aroused from his reverie by the deep-toned bell in the clock tower proclaiming the hour of twelve; the last vibration was yet stirring the air when he heard a very soft voice make the mysterious observation—

"Oh, if you please sir, Abel Alley."

Arthur looked round rather bewildered, and at last discovered the speaker, a little girl of about five years old, very raggedly clad in garments that were many sizes too large for her, and contrasted ludicrously with her baby-face and tiny figure. Her hair, which was long and tangled, was unmistakably golden in colour, and had it been properly combed would have been very beautiful. She had large intelligent eyes, which were red with crying. On the whole Arthur decided that if her face were clean, she would be

exceedingly pretty, at present however her appearance was simply fantastic and strange. This extremely small figure stood at his elbow, breathlessly repeating—

"Oh, if you please sir, Abel Alley."

"I think you must be a fraction of the sphinx," said Arthur, "my name isn't Abel Alley."

As if convinced to the contrary the child repeated the words.

"On reflection," said Arthur, "you are not a sphinx, but a relative of the raven that haunted Edgar Allan Poe. For you are rather hoarse, very black, very mysterious, and have only two words for all conversation. Who in the name of wonder is Abel Alley?"

"Nellie Vumps—Abel Alley," said the child.

"The plot is thickening," said Arthur, "what have thumps to do with it? You are much too fractional to threaten."

The child began to cry again, but still murmured the magic words as though they formed an incantation.

"Don't cry little Raven," said Arthur kindly, "we'll get to the bottom of this mystery yet. Where do you live?"

The little creature answered despairingly, "Abel Alley, New Cut."

"Oh," said Arthur, "that's it. Now you begin to be intelligible Raven, which the original bird never was. You've lost your way, and want me to take you home I suppose.

The child gave a number of nods and left off crying directly.

"Under ordinary circumstances," said Arthur, pursuing his fantastic humour, "I might decline the honour, but I am a knight errant now, Raven, and bound to redress all wrongs; therefore you may consider me your slave. What do you like best in the world?"

"Hardbake," replied the child readily, finding the plain question out of the long words by a kind of instinct.

"Ah," said Arthur, you are a disciple of the

utilitarians, and condense the philosophy of your school of thought into a single word. Hardbake is rather a bilious kind of refreshment, Raven, and in the remote period when I used to eat it I fonnd it unpleasantly sticky, still candour should be rewarded, and you shall have some."

So he took her into a confectioner's close by, and bought not only the delicacy in question but some cakes and buns, which she devoured voraciously. Then they went out into the streets again together.

People looked curiously at him as they passed, smiling to see him in such strange companionship, but he cared nothing for that. Little girls had always a kind of fascination for him, and there was something about this one—dirty, untidy and neglected as she was—that both interested and amused him.

The child, stimulated by her unwontedly sumptuous repast and the new sensation of being protected and spoken kindly to by a gentleman,

lost all reserve and talked freely, with that strange medley of childishness and old-fashioned knowledge, ignorance and shrewdness that forms the mind of London children whose nomadic life is in the open streets, who are taught nothing yet learn much.

"Are you the Prince of Wales, sir?" she asked, after a pause.

"No," said Arthur, laughing. "What in the world put that idea into your head?"

"Because I heard tell that he was rich and handsome, and wore fine clothes, and you do that. We never have gentlemen like you come down the Cut."

Arthur smiled at the child's reasoning, but he sighed as he thought of the influences around this young life, and the overwhelming probabilities against the child's escaping the universal taint.

"Ah little Raven," he said sadly, "you are innocent now, and a clear stream of running water would transform you into a dove, but if you

get your wings soiled with shame, as nearly all around you do, no tears will wash away that stain."

The child looked wonderingly up into his face, and after a minute's consideration, said gravely—

"Mother did wash my face this morning sir, and she's always combing my hair, but 'taint much good, I'm just the same in a few minutes."

"That's precisely the reasoning of half the social reformers of the day," said Arthur, "but you must persevere in washing Raven, and so must they. Here is a gentleman who thinks otherwise, but as his profession is a grimy one, prejudice is natural in his case. Here friend, do you know a place near here called Abel Alley?"

The man he accosted was a sweep, with an almost superhuman power of grinning.

"Yes, sir," he replied touching his forehead with a sootbrush by way of salute, as unconcernedly as if it had been made for that purpose, "if you take the fust turnin' on your right, and the

second—no—the third on yer left, go as fur as yer can, you'll see a public wot's called 'The Furrin' Prince,' right alongside o' that's a halley."

"I beg your pardon," said Arthur, "what did you say there was?"

"A halley," rejoined his sooty companion, still grinning, "go down that and you'll find another one at the bottom, that's Habel Halley, but I warn yer it ain't a place for swells."

"Oh I've seen more rough service than you imagine," said Arthur good naturedly, "and can take very good care of myself, there's a lady in the case you see," he added, stroking the child's golden hair.

At this the sweep grinned as though he had lived in solitude and silence for years, accumulating hilarity, which now for the first time exploded. Arthur handed him sixpence, saying—

"Let me advise you, if you spend that in beer, which you probably will, to wait till you get out of this neighbourhood. If the liquor sold here

is to be judged of by the look of the public houses, it would injure your liver, and then you'd lose your remarkably cheerful disposition. Good day." And with that Arthur left him.

"Of all the cool coves as ever I see," soliloquised the sweep, as he watched Arthur disappear, "that chap's the coolest."

At which reflection he grinned for fifteen consecutive minutes.

By closely following his advise however, Arthur arrived at the public house of which he had spoken, a very disreputable tavern, which a gaudy signboard and a roughly painted inscription proclaimed to be 'The Foreign Prince.'"

Of this potentate's nationality it is difficult to speak with anything like certainty, his face was black as that of the Prince of Morocco, but there is doubt whether this was owing to the artist who designed it, or the atmosphere in which it hung. The dress had been originally blue, red and green, with a liberal allowance of gold-lace, expressed

by a bilious looking gamboge. But occasionally gentlemen living in the neighbourhood, whose objection to princes of any kind was greater than their love for the fine arts, after drinking freely of the Foreign Prince's liquors would pelt his painted effigy with mud, and these anti-royalist demonstrations had not improved the artistic effect.

But the child on seeing the unsightly daub clapped her hands, as recognising a familiar object, and becoming Arthur's guide, led him to the hovel where she lived.

Abel Alley was one of those pestilential haunts, which are a stain and scar on the face of London, giving the lie to our boasts of civilization, and sending up to heaven day and night an inarticulate cry for vengeance.

The dwellings, if they could be called such, were in various stages of ruin and decay, yet in these miserable tenements unfit for human habitation, men and women herded together in squalid

hungry poverty, regardless of health and decency. Surely the angels before the great white throne must veil their faces from the sight of the agony and misery of human souls, though men can bear to think of them so calmly.

Arthur looked round the squalid alley with a pitying glance. Such scenes were not new to him, for it had been an old dream of his to consecrate his life to the great work of social reform, the work which no man, no society, no age can perfectly accomplish, but which must be attempted manfully, and toiled at with the noblest powers of heart, and hand, and brain, or society suffers the direst penalties in every class.

"Abel Alley," said Arthur thoughtfully, "it would have been more fitting to have called it after Cain."

The alley was strewn with rubbish of all descriptions, animal and vegetable matter in advanced stages of decomposition polluted the atmosphere. Everything seemed damp and rotting undisturbed,

and the air to be heavy with contagion of disease, moral and physical.

"This is home," said the child stopping at one of the hovels.

'Home' was a single room with bare walls and floors, and a low ceiling, in which the child, her mother, another woman, and two more children lived, ate their meals when they could get any and slept. For purposes of suicide by suffocation the place was well adapted, but it was difficult to imagine anything else it was fit for.

"Is that Nellie?" said a weak voice.

"Yes mother," cried the child, and hugged her affectionally.

"I have brought your little girl home," said Arthur kindly, "I found her in the Westminster Bridge Road, where she had lost her way. Is there anything I can do for you? I am afraid you are ill."

The woman to whom he spoke was young,

indeed though haggard and worn by disease and poverty she could not have been more than three or four-and-twenty. She had long golden hair like her child's, which hung neglected and unbound below her waist, this, and her large sad eyes, were the only traces left of what had been once great physical beauty.

On learning the cause of Arthur's visit, she looked gratefully at him, and the tears startled to her eyes, kindness was evidently a novelty to her.

"Thank you, sir," she said, "it was very—very kind of you. Nellie is all the world to me—I have nothing else to live for. As to myself sir, that is not worth your thought, though I thank you for that too."

She spoke in the unmistakable accents of one who is not entirely uneducated. Arthur was struck by this, and by the weariness of life that every look conveyed.

"But you are not well," he said gently, "I am

not a doctor, but I have studied medicine for some years. Let me feel your pulse."

It was feverish and very weak, he saw at a glance that she was very ill, and formed his resolution accordingly.

"Is any doctor attending you?" he asked. She shook her head. "I have no money for doctors," she said, "and the Parish doctor doesn't often come this way."

"You need greater medical skill than mine," said Arthur, "I will return this afternoon with a doctor, in the meantime I will write a prescription for a cooling draught that will ease the fever, and may give you some sleep."

He wrote the prescription, and despatched a messenger to get it made up. Then he took her work, some rough tailoring, from her hands.

"You are not in a fit state for anything but rest," he said.

"The work must be done sir," she said faintly.

"Then it shall be done," he replied cheerfully,

" I'd do it myself sooner than you should. Who can do this work beside yourself?"

" Mrs. Jones sir, in the room above."

" How much remains to be done?"

" About two hours work, sir, it's for Messrs. Lumm and Stunby, and I get paid at the rate of a penny an hour."

Arthur felt a strong inclination to choke the firm in question, by way of expressing *his* views on the subject of merited remuneration, however he only said, " I dare say Mrs. Jones will do it," and ran up stairs with the obnoxious articles in his hands.

Mrs. Jones was only too delighted at the prospect of earning a shilling by two hours work, and Arthur returned to the room below empty handed.

" That little matter is disposed of," he said, " and now all you have to do is to rest."

The poor girl—she was only old by poverty and shame—burst into tears as he spoke.

"Why do you trouble yourself about me?" she asked.

"I have done very little," he answered lightly, "you would do the same for me if our positions were reversed."

She gave a low moan of pain, then cried passionately—

"Do you know what I am? An outcast from society—a woman who has a child and yet has never worn a wedding ring upon her finger?"

"Yes," he replied quietly, "I know it very well. What of that? Have you forfeited thereby all claim to human compassion and sympathy?"

"They told me so at home," she answered wildly, "when they drove me from the house with my baby at my breast. They——"

"Stay," said Arthur, interrupting her, "you are exciting yourself more than your strength will endure. You shall tell me your story bye-and-bye if it will comfort you, but for the present you must try to be calm and quiet."

"Tell me one thing then," she said, fixing her large eyes earnestly upon him, "you have never seen me in your life before, yet you have spent time and money for my sake, you know my degradation—yet you, a gentleman, have never by so much as a look slighted or scorned me. You talk to me with respect as though I were a rich lady whose soul was pure. Why are you unlike all the world?"

Arthur hesitated a moment, then answered proudly as the Red Cross Knight would have spoken of the Faerie Queene—

"Because there is a lady, young and beautiful whom I love, I parted with her this morning, but the seal of her knighthood is on my lips, and I dare not pass by sorrow without trying to lessen it, or see wrong without attempting to redress it."

She was about to reply when the messenger returned with the medicine. Arthur gave her a little of it, and having left her in charge of the

woman with whom she shared the room, went in search of medical aid.

He was not long in returning with a doctor, in whose skill he had great confidence, but his worst fears were realised.

"She may last a week," was the verdict given with an indifference, that sprang from professional habit not hardness of heart, "or perhaps ten days, but not longer. There's a low fever hanging about her but that we can treat. What she is dying of is fatigue, utter exhaustion of body and soul. Would you like me to see her again?"

"Yes," said Arthur, "she shall not die without every effort to save her though the hope is a forlorn one. There has been cruel wrong there, doctor."

"Ah," replied the doctor, "it's a pity she was ever so handsome. My own daughters are all ugly and I'm very glad of it."

With which observation he took his departure.

His predictions were literally fulfilled. Annie Yempson (for that was her name, Yumps being a corruption of Nellie's originating) lingered on, her soul trembling between life and death, for seven days; on the eighth, when he called, she said she was better and would like to tell him something of her life.

He had contrived to have her removed into a more comfortable room. It was poor enough, bare and miserable, with no furniture but a bed, a crazy wash-hand-stand (holding a cracked basin and a jug without a handle) and a solitary chair, but it was larger than the other as well as cleaner, and such as it was she had it to herself.

Arthur sat down on the only chair in the room, while she told him—her weak voice broken with sobs—the story of her life.

She was the only daughter of a Nonconformist minister, who had gained some celebrity as a scholar and a preacher, a man of considerable ability, but holding harsh, austere and pitiless

views. She had been educated in France where she acquired many accomplishments, and distinguished herself in several branches of study. But as any one but John Yempson would have seen beforehand, French scenes, French books, and French society were far more fascinating to his daughter than volumes of Calvinistic theology and sermons two hours long. Annie returned from France when she was seventeen, and her father scarcely knew whether to be delighted or disappointed at the change in her. In secret he was proud of her beauty, her grace and her accomplishments, but when he spoke to her, he talked as if these things were positive sins, and he put the harshest restraints upon her, "to save her," he said "from the eternal torments of hell."

They lived in a little Devonshire village, where Annie might have been as happy and as pure as the flowers and birds, but John Yempson had decided that only restraint could save her from perdition, and therefore made her life dull and

wearisome. From all the village gatherings she was absent; enjoyment was a carnal thing; her spirit must be broken to be made ripe for repentance. She played the harp, and music was heterodox; she danced gracefully, and this was clearly a gift conferred by the Devil; so on all occasions when these accomplishments would be admired, her father insisted upon her staying at home.

But after she had been home a few months, the young squire came of age, and there were great festivities at the Hall. Her father gave a reluctant consent to Annie's going, and so for the first time since she left France she escaped from the home atmosphere of grim austerity and dreariness, to a gay scene of music, laughter and the light tread of dancers' feet.

In all that company no one was half so fair as Annie, no one danced so gracefully, no one's laughter had such a musical tone. The young squire noticed this, and not only danced with her

several times, but contrived in a conversation they had together in the conservatory, to appoint a place of meeting for the next day.

The meeting was the cause of an intimacy between them, which soon ripened on her part into passionate devoted love, on his to a selfish sensual degrading passion.

And so the old cruel tragedy was played over again. She was young, inexperienced, and thoughtless, trusting in the honour of a man who was heartless, false, and diabolically selfish; she had no mother's influence to steady her, no wise counsel from her father to be her safeguard—she loved profoundly—she was tempted and she fell.

There came a day when she stood before her father with her baby at her breast, and he unmindful of One who poured the balm of Divine tenderness and human love into such wounds as these, cursed his erring daughter and drove her from his home.

But for her child Annie would have thrown

her life away. Deserted by the man who had ruined her; spurned by the father whom she loved; scorned by her old companions — what refuge remained for her but the grave? But the baby's little hand clasped her life so that she could not let it go: days and months passed, she was weak and ill, but she did not die.

She came to London, and for her child's sake fought with death for five years. By sewing till her delicate fingers bled, by working day and night, she had earned enough to buy bread and to pay for the miserable apartment where she lived; the struggle was nearly over, and in a few hours the broken heart would be at rest.

It was not in this form she told her story. She blamed no one but herself, and only asked him to believe she was penitent. Arthur's fancy filled in the details of the broken history, much as they had actually happened; but it was only long afterwards that he learnt the story as it is narrated here.

"I am dying now," she said faintly, for the effort had exhausted her, "the doctor told me I could not live many days, but I could not bear to have you think me viler than I am—I have sinned, but every night I have cried to God for forgiveness, though a minister once told me Heaven would be deaf to my prayers. But you do not believe that, do you?"

"Whoever declares that Heaven rejects penitence lies," said Arthur, "and such lies are the chosen language of hell. Life is sad enough as it is, but if the Redeemer's sacrifice is not for all who seek it, life becomes a tale of horror, at which heaven and earth alike must shudder. I do not underrate the gravity of your sin, but I need not speak of that, for I read in every line of your face how deeply you have suffered, and I dare not speak of what God has forgiven. I do not hide from you the fact that you are dying, and I believe profoundly—in a few hours it may be, having

cast all your sorrow at His feet—you will lean on the bosom of Christ, and learn what this poor world cannot understand—that the meaning of Heaven is love."

She would have spoken, but he checked her.

" There is another thought that troubles you," said Arthur " I can read it in your face."

She answered " yes," faintly, and made a weak movement of her hand towards the child, who was playing with some wooden bricks Arthur had given her, as happy as though she had been a princess of a fairy legend.

" Nellie," he called to her, " come here for a moment." He raised the child to kiss her mother, then laying his hand on Nellie's golden hair he said—" my life henceforward is to work for the cause of the weak and the wronged. I will take this child after your life is ended, and try to supply the place of the father she has lost. It is a fitting beginning for my life work."

She raised his hand to her lips gratefully, and with a kind of reverence.

"I dare to hope for Christ's forgiveness now," she said, "I could not while I found men and women so stern."

Those were the last words she ever spoke. Arthur left her with a kind farewell, and when he returned next day he found her dead.

She had not in her confession told him the name of her seducer, and he had not asked her, divining the motive of her reticence. But now that he stood by her lifeless form, he saw that the dead hand clasped something. He took it from the rigid fingers and saw that it was the likeness of a man. Of one too, whom he knew as an old schoolfellow and associate, whom long ago he had proved to be false and treacherous, and from whom he had parted with undisguised contempt.

Annie Yempson had been wronged and deceived by this man, her life had been made a curse to her to satisfy his profligate nature, yet she died not only forgiving but loving him still. It is only when we fathom the patient forgiveness of

womanhood that we begin to realise the ceaseless forgiveness of God.

Arthur muttered the name of Morton Legrange in no gentle tone as he looked at the portrait, then flinging it on the ground, crushed it beneath his feet.

After the funeral was over, he took the child aside and tried to explain what had happened to her.

She was only five years old, but she had learnt premature wisdom in the streets, and it was almost with a woman's grief and understanding that she looked up into his face and said—

"What shall I do, sir? Nobody will take care of me, and I shall die."

"I will take care of you little Raven," he answered tenderly, "come with me, and we will always try to make each other happy."

So with the child clinging to him, he left Abel Alley; and thus his work of social reform began, and Nellie Yempson's life of raggedness and misery ended.

END OF VOL. I.

ERRATA.

Page 73, line 8: for "breath" read "breathe."

Pages 127, 128 and 129: for "Hermiæ" read "Hermia."

Page 130, line 18: for "cannot be" read "cannot lie."

„ 163, „ 20: „ "absolutedly" read "undoubtedly."

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